The Marvel Magazine of Fantasy & Science-Fiction / October 1984 / $2.50 £1.50 U.K. - $3.00 CAN.

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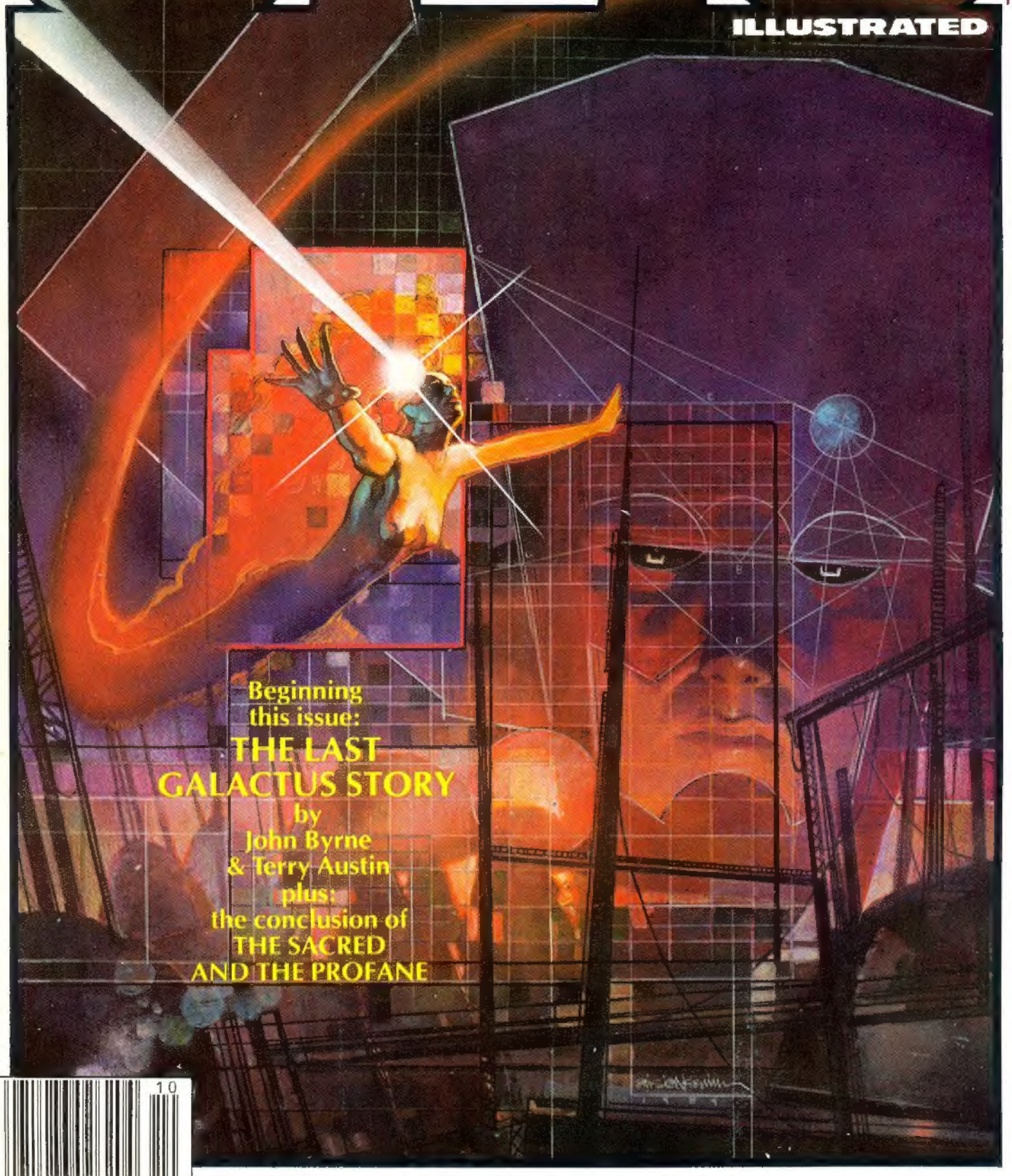

Beginning this issue:
THE LAST GALACTUS STORY
by
John Byrne & Terry Austin
plus:
the conclusion of
THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

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THE SACRED & THE PROFANE

THE QUESTIONS OF PURPOSE WHICH HAVE TROUBLED ME DURING THIS JOURNEY THROUGH THE HEAVENS DISAPPEAR IN THE GRIP OUR IMMEDIATE PLIGHT. AND YET, PARADOXICALLY, THEY PRESENT THEMSELVES, LARGE AND INGLORIOUS, AS THE VERY SOURCE OF THAT PLIGHT. THAT IT HAS COME TO THIS LESS EXALTED STATE IS TRAGIC. THAT WE ATTEND IN CONFUSION AND FEAR IS SHAMEFUL.

§ LOYALTIES ABOARD ST. CATHERINE'S SEEM TO HAVE BECOME DIVIDED SHARPLY. IT ALMOST APPEARS AS THOUGH WE HAVE BEEN REDUCED TO OUR MOST BASIC FUNCTIONS. WHILE THE CREW AND TECHNICAL STAFF INSIST UPON THE MORE PRAGMATIC SOLUTIONS, THE CLERGY SEEK TO PRESERVE SOME SENSE OF DECORUM AND PURPOSE. THIS DICHOTOMY HAS RESULTED ONLY IN CONFRONTATION. MUST WE, LIKE THOMAS BECKETT, CHOOSE BETWEEN AESTHETICS AND EXPEDIENCY, OR CAN A TRUER SOLUTION BE DISCOVERED IN ACTS OF FAITH.

§ IF THERE IS ANY HOPE FOR SALVATION I DO NOT THINK IT WILL BE DISPATCHED BY OUR TECHNICIANS, OUR CLERGY . . . OR EVEN BROTHER JOSHUA. IT WILL BE THROUGH AN ACT OF GOD. NEITHER PROPRIETY NOR EFFECTIVENESS WILL BE ISSUES. GOD IS A SPIRIT. HE IS WORSHIPPED IN SPIRIT AND SHALL CERTAINLY ACT IN SPIRIT.

§ WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAVE ACTED IN THE MOST VISCERAL MANNER. UPON EXAMINING THE MEDICAL DATA ON THE DECEASED PERSONNEL I HAVE COME TO THAT MOST DISTRESSING REALIZATION. THE PILOTS WHO CRASHED IN THE HANGAR DECK WERE NOT ONLY ALIVE ON IMPACT BUT UNHARMED AS WELL. THE CAUSE OF THE CRASH HAS BEEN ATTRIBUTED TO THEIR PANIC. JOHN MILLS, THE YOUNG ORGANIST, DIED OF ASPHIXIATION AS HE STRUGGLED TO FREE HIMSELF FROM THE SERPENTINE COILS OF THE CREATURE. EVEN DOCTOR WHITING SUCCUMBED TO CARDIAC ARREST MORE LIKELY BROUGHT ON BY FEAR THAN ANYTHING ELSE. IT SEEMS THAT ERIC WAS CORRECT. PROJECTING OUR FEARS ONTO THESE THINGS HAS NOT ONLY LEFT US DEFENSELESS — BUT GIVEN THEM THE MOST EFFECTIVE DEFENSE THEY COULD HOPE FOR. THESE CREATURES HAVE NOT NEARLY AS MUCH HARM TO US AS WE HAVE DONE TO OURSELVES. ONLY A PROFOUND LACK OF HUMILITY COULD HAVE LED TO THIS.

§ HUMILITY IS THE VERY BASIS OF GRACE, AND IT SHOULD BE THE TRUE AND SOLID FOUNDATION OF ONE'S SOUL. WE MUST RECEIVE OUR DELIVERANCE WITH THAT HUMILITY AND WE MUST PRESERVE IT AT ALL COSTS. CAN THIS VESSEL, BY ANY STRETCH OF OUR WEARY IMAGINATIONS, BE CONSIDERED A CREATION OF CHARITY — OR IF IT IS, IN REALITY, AN IDOL. "EVERY IDOL, HOWEVER EXALTED, TURNS OUT IN THE LONG RUN, TO BE A MOLOCH, HUNGRY FOR HUMAN SACRIFICE."

S. MARIANNA

By Dean Motter and Ken Steacy A STAR † REACH PRODUCTION c MCMLXXXIII

PRONUNCIATO
Chapter VII

Final Deliverance

SISTER — ?
SISTER, I'M GLAD YOU'RE HERE. I WAS THINKING OF GOING TO THE CHAPEL. IT WOULD MEAN A LOT TO ME IF YOU WOULD COME — AND PRAY WITH ME. I'M AFRAID I'M A LITTLE OUT OF PRACTICE.
OF COURSE.
I'VE BEEN VERY UNKIND TO YOU. I REGRET THAT NOW. I HOPE YOU KNOW THAT.
YES.
DAVID! WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S WRONG?
JOSHUA! — AND FRANKLIN. HE KILLED HIM! I SAW HIM KILL FRANKLIN! HE —
SISTER —
DAVID, — CALM DOWN! WHAT HAPPENED?

THAT WILL BE ENOUGH!
JOSHUA . . .

No!

OH GOD OH GOD OH GOD – !
SERVICE ACCESS HATCH #2

AH, ALEX. HOW IS THE EXCAVATION PROGRESSING? HAVE THEY REACHED THE CARDINAL YET?
WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN MR. DAEDALUS? THE EXCAVATION WAS CLOSED DOWN HOURS AGO! THE CARDINAL IS, FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, DEAD.
WHAT?
AND WHAT'S MORE, VICTOR AND SOME OF THE TECHNICIANS HAVE COMMANDEERED THE SHIP. WE'RE GOING HOME. THEY SAY.
ERIC! ALEX! YOU MUST COME QUICKLY. IT'S JOSHUA! DOWN IN THE SANCTUARY!
MOTHER OF GOD . . .

WELL, WELL . . . PENITANTS. ENTER. YOU ARE JUST IN TIME TO BE WITNESS TO MY EXHORTATION . . . ON YOUR KNEES —
BROTHER JOSHUA —

ON YOUR KNEES . . . VERY GOOD.
I AM THE SOLE SALVATION FOR ST. CATHERINE'S MISSION, AND HOMAGE IS DUE ME.
YOU BEGIN TO REALIZE THAT AS A SOLDIER OF THE CROSS I HAVE SOME VERY GRAVE RESPONSIBILITIES. THAT IS WHY I HAD TO KILL FRANKLIN, YOU SEE . . .
I MEAN, HE WAS CONTRAVENING THE WORD OF GOD, AND MYSELF.
I ASSUME HE DIDN'T REALIZE THAT GOD HAS SENT ME TO DELIVER US FROM THE EVIL THAT NOW SURROUNDS US. BUT HE IS FORGIVEN.
OH, YOU POOR FOOLS. I PITY YOU. I HAVE MERCY ON YOU. IN NINE DAYS WE SHALL ALL BE REWARDED. CAN YOU GRASP THE TRUTH? NINE DAYS, AND WE SHALL BE THE FIRST LIVING BEINGS TO ENTER HEAVEN, ALIVE, SINCE JESUS CHRIST! I HAVE DONE THIS FOR US!

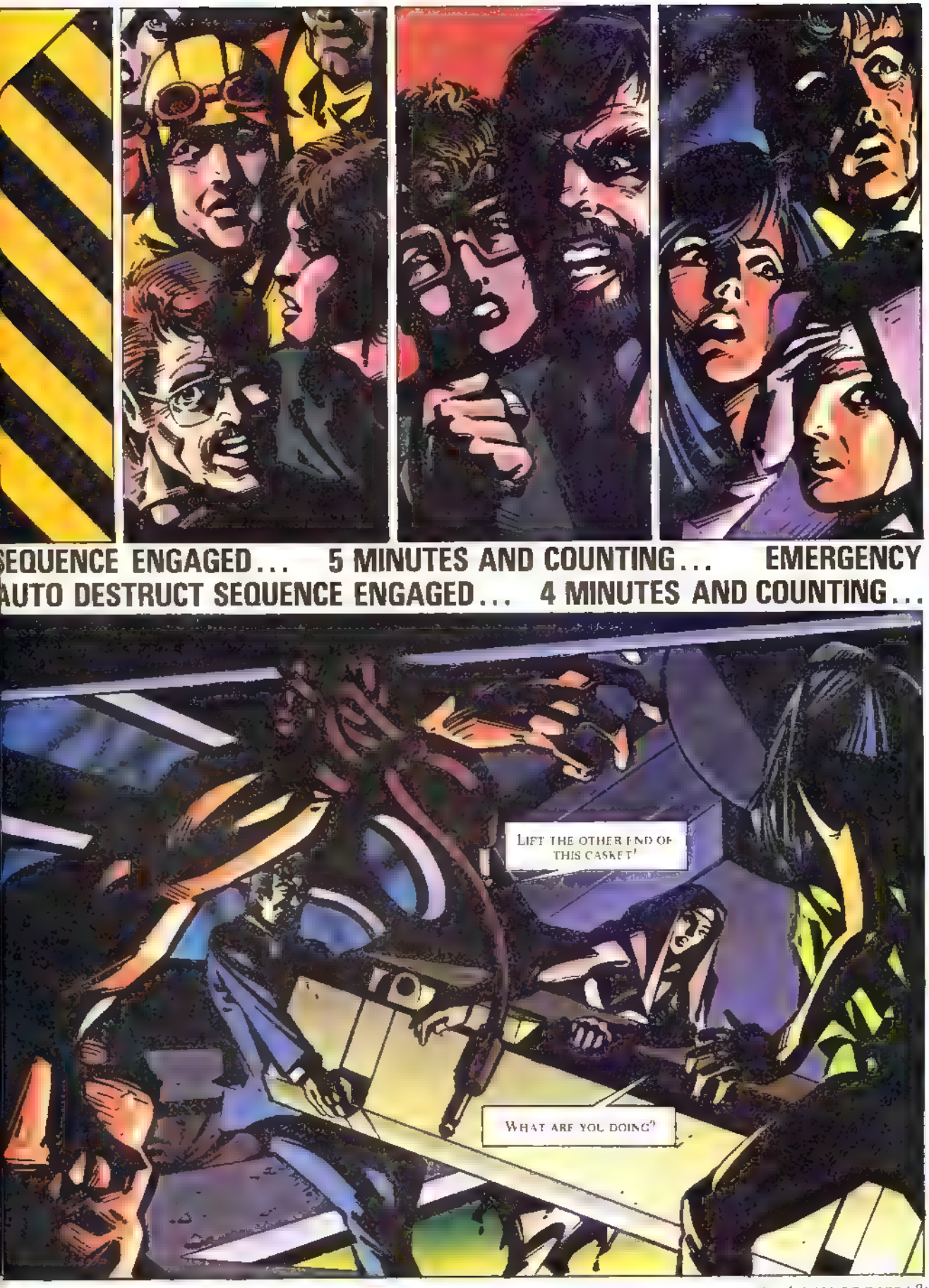
JOAN ?
YOU BASTARD

He's delirious! We'll have to restrain him. Get his glove off and bind his arm to that railing!

You fools! You don't know what you're doing!

SYSTEM ARMED

YOU'
YOU SHALL NOT TAKE THESE PEOPLE! IN THE NAME OF ALL THAT IS HOLY — THEY MUST BE SPARED!
ATTENTION: AUTO DESTRU
EVACUATION ... ATTENTIO
SET ME FREE IN THE NAME OF JESUS! IN THE NAME OF LUCIFER FRANKLIN SHALL HEAR OF THIS ERIC I PROMISE YOU!


SEQUENCE ENGAGED... 5 MINUTES AND COUNTING... EMERGENCY
AUTO DESTRUCT SEQUENCE ENGAGED... 4 MINUTES AND COUNTING...
LIFT THE OTHER END OF THIS CASKET!
WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

continues on page 68

APOCRYPHA

"After the accident, man-made germs spread over most of the earth. Some eighty percent of the world's human population died within the first three months, and even those who were immune were rendered sterile. A little more than sixty-five percent of the earth's animals also died of the sickness. But the survivors—the animal survivors—continued to sire offspring. It confounded man that, as his numbers dwindled by the year, the animal population stabilized. It seemed for a time that the meek would inherit the earth, and indeed they might have, if man had been able to accept his own extinction. Instead, he used what little was left of his science to engineer a new race. Born of animal and human genes, the resulting hybrids, like most of man's adventures, left much to be desired.

"All the pure humans are long dead now, and for those of us who are their heirs, the world is ours for the taking.

"Therein lies the problem.

"The apes—led by Old Joe, the only one of their number capable of speech or sophisticated thought—are determined to take it all, exterminating the rest of us if it comes to that.

"Sometimes it seems that all that stand between our world and total disaster are the protective efforts of the dog-men we call the Far Rovers, and the peace keeping efforts of a few members of our Governing Council.

"And some of those efforts have been sadly misguided..."

CHAPTER SIX:
THE STORM
"ZACK ARRIVED BACK AT THE COUNCIL HOUSE IN TIME FOR THE VOTE AND JUST AHEAD OF A MASSIVE THUNDERSTORM. AS BAD AS ZACHARY'S DAY HAD BEEN THUS FAR, IT WAS ABOUT TO GET A WHOLE LOT WORSE."
MANDY, I NEED TO TALK TO YOU IT'S ABOUT FELICIA.
TAKE YOUR HANDS OFF OF ME!
WHAT THE HELL KIND OF GREETING IS THAT? WHAT'S THE MATTER WITH YOU?
I ALREADY KNOW MY SISTER IS DEAD, ZACK! FELICIA WAS TORTURED. BUTCHERED. SCAR FOUND WHAT THEY LEFT OF HER EARLY THIS AFTERNOON.
NO!... BABY, LISTEN. I... MANDY, IT'S NOT WHAT YOU THINK!
I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT, ZACK! NOT YOUR BULLSHIT ABOUT PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE OR THE KIND OF FARMLAND YOU WANT OUR CHILD TO GROW UP IN... NONE OF IT! WHAT THE HELL DID HE OFFER YOU TO BETRAY YOUR OWN KIND?

story by John Lakey/Artifact Studios
© 1984 John and Laura Lakey

I DIDN'T WANT FELICIA -ANYBODY-- TO BE HURT. I JUST WANTED ALL OF US TO BE SAFE, MANDY, PLEASE...
GET OUT OF HERE, ZACK. I CAN'T BEAR THE SIGHT OF YOU.
I THINK SCAR'LL KILL YOU ..AND IF I DIDN'T HAVE TO VOTE IN FELICIA'S PLACE, I'D STAY AND WATCH!
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND... WHAT DO YOU WANT...
...ME TO SAY...?
"WELL, ONE OF THE GOOD THINGS ABOUT MAN WAS THAT HE HAD A SAYING FOR JUST ABOUT EVERY OCCASION.
"LIKE, 'TOO DUMB TO COME IN OUT OF THE RAIN' OR, 'PRIDE GOETH BEFORE A FALL,' OR...

"...'RIGHT BEFORE MIGHT'.
WHAP
"..'NEVER HIT A MAN WITH GLASSES!..
BAP
"...'LOVE THINE ENEMY'..
"...'TURN THE OTHER CHEEK,' OR..."
WHAP
"'YOU CAN'T KEEP A GOOD MAN DOWN!.."

"...'AN EYE FOR AN EYE'...
"...'BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER'...
"YES, SIR, MAN HAD A MESS OF SAYINGS... TROUBLE WAS...
IF I EVER SEE YOUR FACE AGAIN... YOUR FAULT, MY FAULT, ANYBODY'S FAULT... YOU ARE DEAD, NO MATTER WHAT ELSE HAPPENS, YOU ARE DEAD. YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?
"ZACK COULDN'T THINK OF A SINGLE ONE.
"THE BEST THAT EVEN SCAR COULD COME UP WITH WAS..."
"NOW, ZACK COULD HAVE SAID A LOT OF THINGS... COULD HAVE SAID, 'EVERY DOG HAS HIS DAY.' BUT INSTEAD..."
I UNDERSTAND
"HE JUST, 'STUCK HIS TAIL BETWEEN HIS LEGS' AND SLUNK OFF TO LICK HIS WOUNDS.'"

"SCAR STARED OFF INTO THE DARK, RAINY NIGHT FOR A LONG TIME... ALONE THERE ON THE COUNCIL HOUSE PORCH. IT WASN'T EVERY DAY THAT HE LOST TWO FRIENDS.
REALLY STARTIN' TO POUR!
HUH, OH, HEY, JANGO... YEAH, I BET IT'LL RAIN TH' REST OF TH' NIGHT. WHAT'S UP?
THEY WANT YOU INSIDE FOR THE VOTE, BUT I DON'T THINK YOU NEED TO HURRY... LOOKS LIKE WE GOT OUR WAR...
I JUST HOPE THE WEATHER CLEARS UP... I DON'T MIND TH' COLD, BUT DAMN I HATE TH' RAIN.
THEN I WOULDN'T PLAN ANYTHING FOR TONIGHT IF I WAS YOU... RAININ' DOGS AN' CATS OUT THERE.
ISN'T THAT TH' OTHER WAY AROUND?
WHAT?
IT'S CATS AND DOGS.. RAININ' CATS AND DOGS!
"WELL, LIKE THEY SAY, WHAT'S IN A SAYING ANYWAY?"
I DUNNO, I NEVER HEARD IT THAT WAY
CHAPTER SEVEN:
CATS & DOGS OF WAR

"NEEDLESS TO SAY, I RECOVERED, GIVE OR TAKE A LEG.. THE ROVERS GOT THEIR WAR. . I DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY EXPECTED... BUT LIKE ALL WARS I'VE READ ABOUT...
"...THERE WAS LOTS OF KILLING...
"...ON BOT SIDES...
"...AND HATRED
"...ON BOTH SIDES.
"BUT WHEN IT CAME TO CRUELTY... AND OUT AND OUT BRUTALITY... IT WAS THE APES WHO WERE WITHOUT EQUAL."

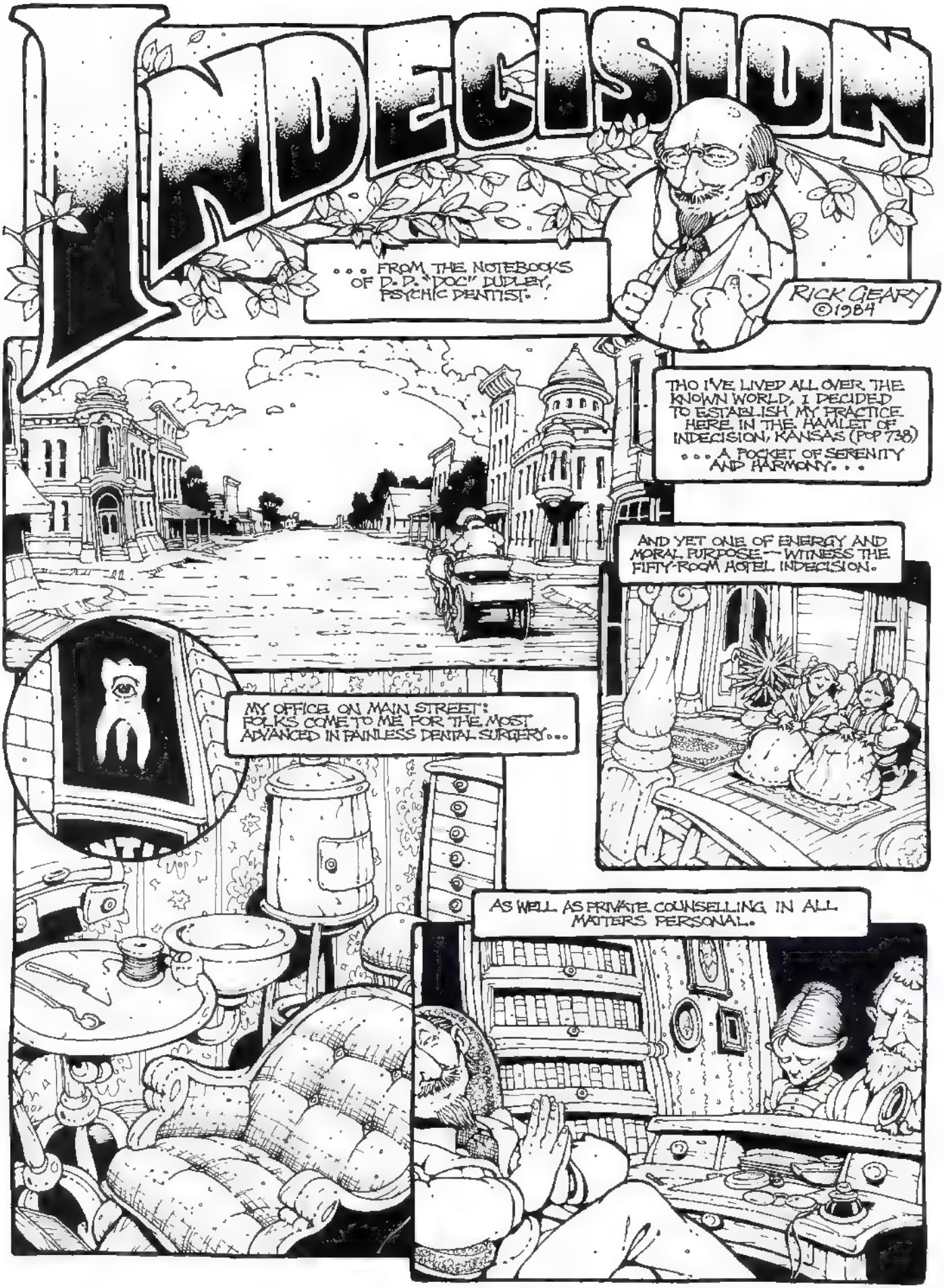
MAMA!
NO...PLEASE!
BLAM BLAM BLAM
" THEY DID THINGS THAT MADE ME ASHAMED TO BE AN ANIMAL.
NO!
NO PLEASE!
" IT WAS ALMOST LIKE THE APES ENJOYED THE THINGS WAR ALLOWED THEM TO DO. "

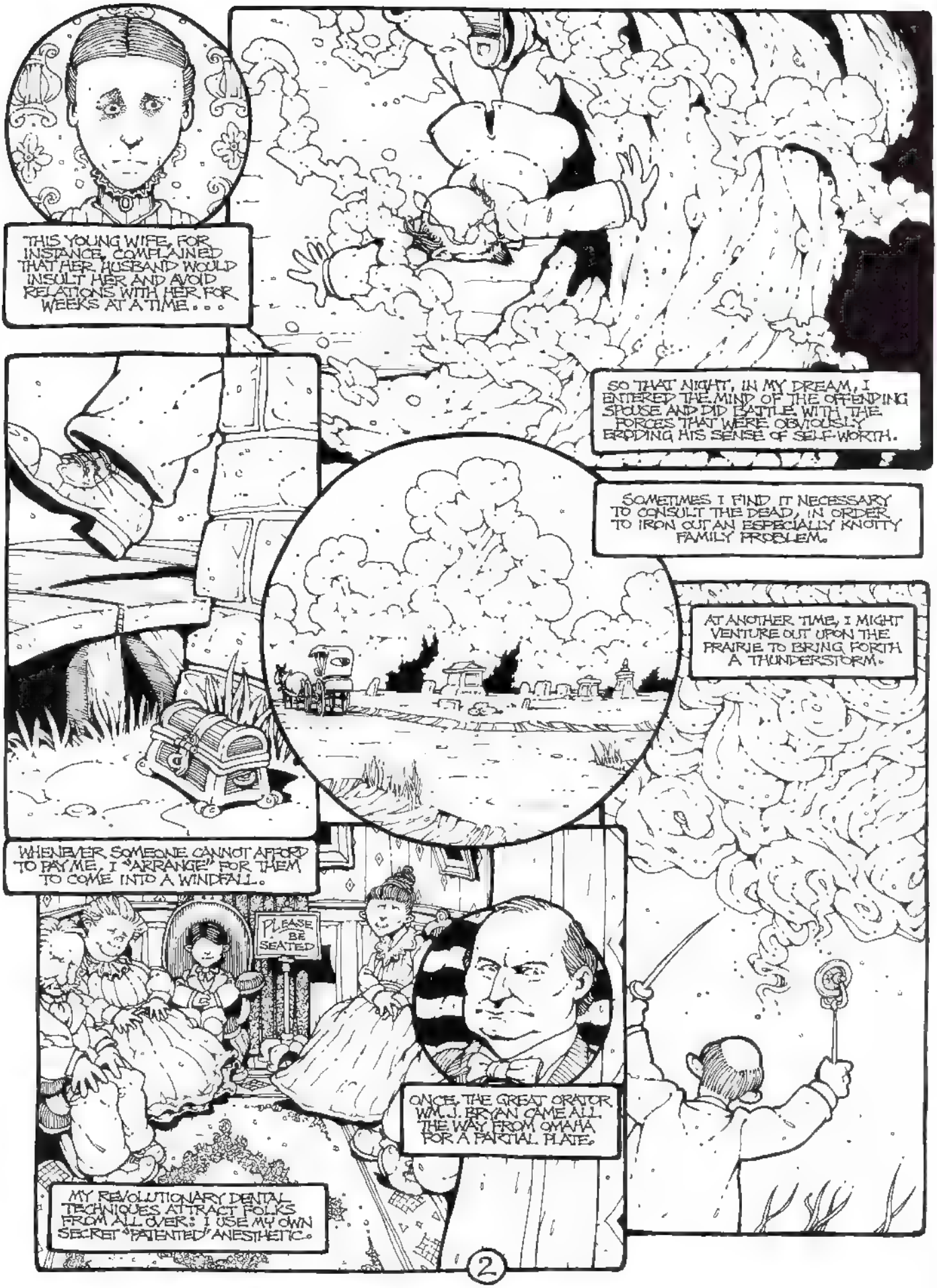
"AT FIRST, SCAR AND THE ROVERS SEEMED TO RELISH THE BATTLES... ALL THAT GLORY AND SUCH, BUT...

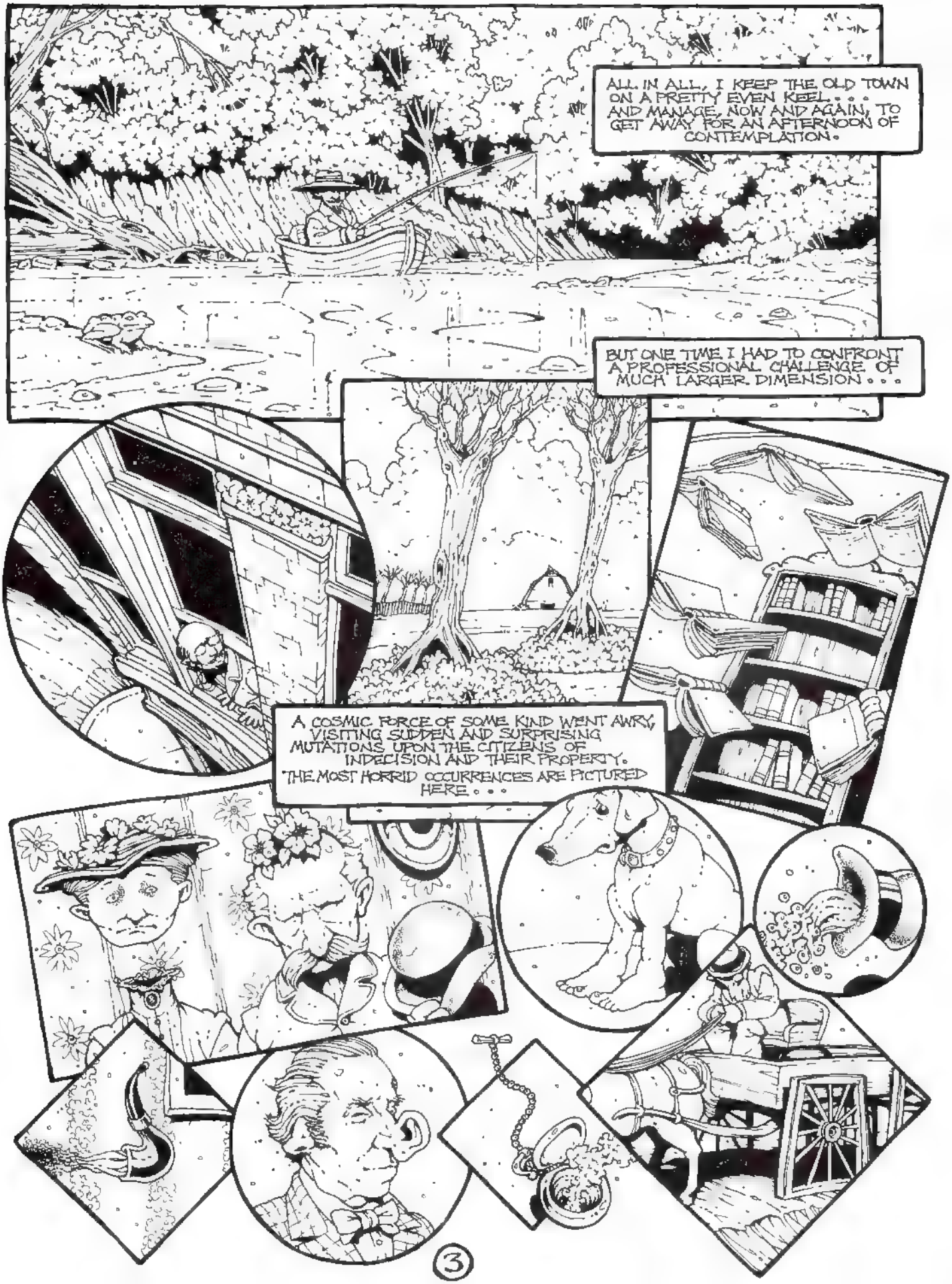
"GRADUALLY, THE APES' SUPERIOR STRENGTH AND SURPLUS OF ARMS BEGAN TO SHOW. SCAR LOST A LOT MORE FRIENDS AND IT FINALLY BECAME APPARENT, EVEN TO HIM, THAT IF *THIS* WAR WAS TO BE WON... IT WAS GOING TO TAKE ***BRAINS***.

" I WAS DRAFTED. TOGETHER, THE ROVERS AND I FORMULATED A PLAN THAT WOULD DESTROY THE FACTORY AND WITH IT, OLD JOE'S ATTEMPT TO RULE THE FARMLAND. TO SUCCEED HOWEVER, OUR SCHEME NEEDED THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE.
FFF
BLACK RIFLE POWDER
EXPLOSIVES
"UNFORTUNATELY, EVEN THE BEST LAID PLANS PLANS OF... WELL, ANYBODY... CAN GO AWRY."
VERMIN!... OMAR, THE VERMIN ARE MOVING, AND THEY MEAN TO CATCH US NAPPING JUST WITHIN THE WEEK ALL THE FARMS BELOW THE FACTORY HAVE BEEN ABANDONED. ABANDONED FOR *HIGHER* GROUND.
I SMELL A *RAT*, M'BOY. A RAT WHO WOULD SEND THE LAKE INTO THIS VALLEY AND DROWN US ALL.
TRIPLE THE GUARD ON THE DAM. BUT TELL THE GUARDS TO KEEP HIDDEN.
I WANT THESE CREATURES CAUGHT AND KILLED... AND IF THE BIG MAN-DOG IS AMONG THEM...
... BRING ME HIS HEAD!

(continues on page 91)


INDECISION
. . . FROM THE NOTEBOOKS OF D. D. "DOC" DUDLEY, PSYCHIC DENTIST.
RICK GEARY ©1984
THO I'VE LIVED ALL OVER THE KNOWN WORLD, I DECIDED TO ESTABLISH MY PRACTICE HERE, IN THE HAMLET OF INDECISION, KANSAS (POP 738) . . . A POCKET OF SERENITY AND HARMONY. . .
AND YET ONE OF ENERGY AND MORAL PURPOSE — WITNESS THE FIFTY-ROOM HOTEL INDECISION.
MY OFFICE ON MAIN STREET: FOLKS COME TO ME FOR THE MOST ADVANCED IN PAINLESS DENTAL SURGERY. . .
AS WELL AS PRIVATE COUNSELLING IN ALL MATTERS PERSONAL.


THIS YOUNG WIFE, FOR INSTANCE, COMPLAINED THAT HER HUSBAND WOULD INSULT HER AND AVOID RELATIONS WITH HER FOR WEEKS AT A TIME...
SO THAT NIGHT, IN MY DREAM, I ENTERED THE MIND OF THE OFFENDING SPOUSE AND DID BATTLE WITH THE FORCES THAT WERE OBVIOUSLY ERODING HIS SENSE OF SELF-WORTH.
SOMETIMES I FIND IT NECESSARY TO CONSULT THE DEAD, IN ORDER TO IRON OUT AN ESPECIALLY KNOTTY FAMILY PROBLEM.
AT ANOTHER TIME, I MIGHT VENTURE OUT UPON THE PRAIRIE TO BRING FORTH A THUNDERSTORM.
WHENEVER SOMEONE CANNOT AFFORD TO PAY ME, I "ARRANGE" FOR THEM TO COME INTO A WINDFALL.
PLEASE BE SEATED
ONCE, THE GREAT ORATOR WM. J. BRYAN CAME ALL THE WAY FROM OMAHA FOR A PARTIAL PLATE.
MY REVOLUTIONARY DENTAL TECHNIQUES ATTRACT FOLKS FROM ALL OVER: I USE MY OWN SECRET "PATENTED" ANESTHETIC.


ALL IN ALL, I KEEP THE OLD TOWN ON A PRETTY EVEN KEEL . . . AND MANAGE, NOW AND AGAIN, TO GET AWAY FOR AN AFTERNOON OF CONTEMPLATION.
BUT ONE TIME I HAD TO CONFRONT A PROFESSIONAL CHALLENGE OF MUCH LARGER DIMENSION . . .
A COSMIC FORCE OF SOME KIND WENT AWRY, VISITING SUDDEN AND SURPRISING MUTATIONS UPON THE CITIZENS OF INDECISION AND THEIR PROPERTY.
THE MOST HORRID OCCURRENCES ARE PICTURED HERE . . .

IN MY DREAM, I SAW THAT THE "FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSE" HAD SNAGGED ON THE SPIRE OF THE INDECISION METHODIST CHURCH.
I LEFT MY BED IMMEDIATELY TO SEE WHAT I COULD DO.
A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM PROVED FAR MORE DIFFICULT THAN I HAD AT FIRST IMAGINED.
I RETURNED HOME AT ABOUT 4AM IN A STATE OF UTTER EXHAUSTION.
THE NEXT DAY, FOLKS REMARKED UPON A CERTAIN VAGUENESS IN MY MANNER, BUT OF COURSE, I COULD TELL NO ONE THE TRUTH—LEAST OF ALL THE METHODISTS.
SINCE THEN, ALL HAS REMAINED QUIET IN INDECISION.

THE GARDENER

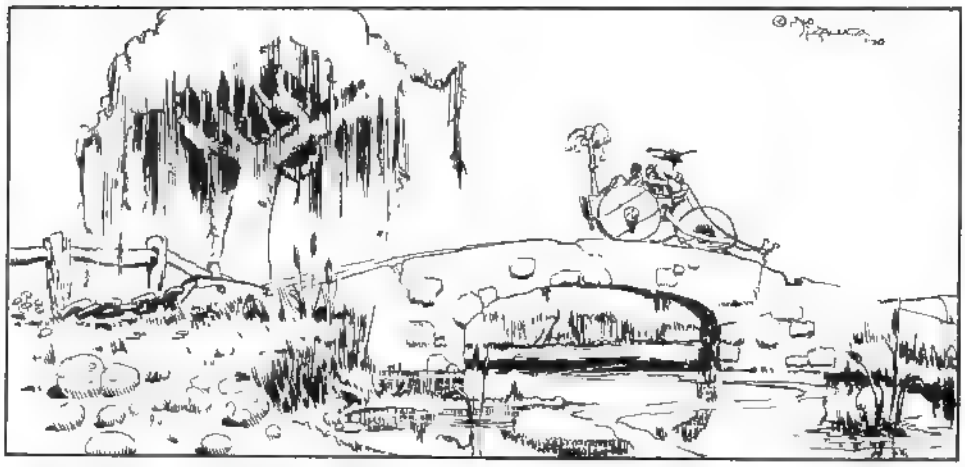
"I DON'T CARE JUST HOW OLD I AM," THE PRINCESS POUTED, "AND I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY OF YOUR 'WHY'S' OR 'BECAUSE'S'... I DON'T WANT TO GO AND I WON'T LIKE IT IF I DO AND NOTHING YOU SAY WILL CHANGE MY MIND 'CAUSE ITS MADE UP!"

"DON'T BE SILLY," SMILED THE DWARF WHOM ANDROMEDA HAD CALLED CLOVER EVER SINCE HER MOTHER, THE QUEEN, HAD BROUGHT HER TO THE GREAT WOODS WHEN SHE WAS AN INFANT. "YOU ARE SIXTEEN AND I'VE TOLD YOU ALL YOUR LITTLE LIFE THAT AT SIXTEEN YOU WOULD RETURN TO THE PALACE... SO ENOUGH OF WORDS."

"BUT I WON'T LIKE IT!"

© 1970 · M W kaluta

"OH, I'M SURE YOU WON'T... THEY TELL ME ALL THE YOUNG GIRLS DRESS UP IN SOFT DRESSES WITH FLOWERS IN THEIR HAIR AND DANCE WITH YOUNG PRINCES ALL THROUGH THE NIGHT. I'M SURE YOU WOULDN'T LIKE THAT!"



THE CART CLUNKED DOWN THE FORESTED PATH, ANDROMEDA'S BELL TREE TINKLING WITH EACH BUMP AND EACH NOTE WAS A COLOR, AND EACH COLOR A SONG.

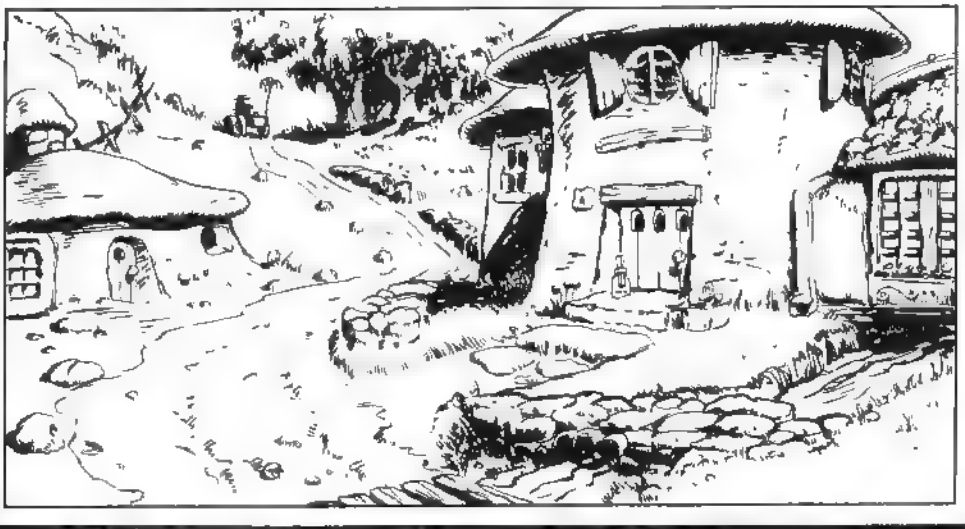
"DO THEY REALLY WEAR FLOWERS IN THEIR HAIR?"

"YES, REALLY."

"THERE, ON THAT HILL, SUCH FLOWERS AS YOU MIGHT FIND IN PLENTY, THE PALACE GARDENS ARE BRIMMING WITH SUCH, ONLY BIGGER AND MORE BEAUTIFUL... GO, PICK SOME FOR YOUR HAIR."

"IF IT PLEASES YOU, CLOVER. BUT NOWHERE COULD FLOWERS BE MORE GRAND THAN HERE, AMONG THE TREES AND SHRUBS!"

"YOUR EYES ARE BLIND TO THAT WHICH YOU'VE NEVER SEEN, DEAREST ANDROMEDA. THE PALACE ABOUNDS IN SHRUBBERY, THE TREES GROW AS IF ENCHANTED. IN TRUTH, IT SEEMS MORE LIKELY THAT THE PALACE WAS SET AMONGST A MAGICIAN'S FOREST THAN THE FOREST PLACED AROUND THE PALACE. YOU WILL CRY WITH JOY!" "I THINK NOT."

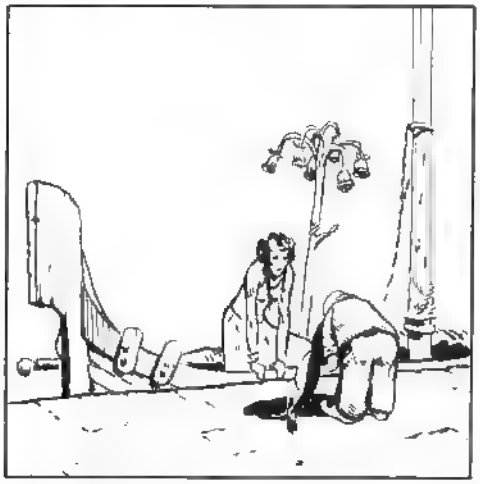


TIME PASSED QUICKLY FOR ANDROMEDA, AS SHE LET HER MIND WANDER WITH CLOVER'S WORDS, A CERTAIN CURIOSITY CREPT INTO HER THOUGHTS LIKE A MISCHIEVOUS SPRITE DANCING ON THE BORDERS OF THE UNKNOWN. "ANDROMEDA! BEHOLD THE PALACE!"

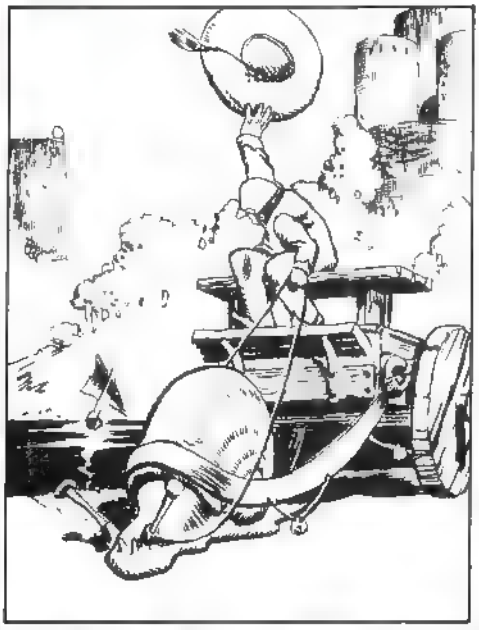
CRYSTAL TOWERS, ACHINGLY HIGH, SCRATCHED THE SKY. AT THEIR BASE, A CINNEBAR FOREST, SPLASHED YELLOW AND BRIGHT ORANGE, SPREAD LIKE A GIANT'S LAWN DOWN TO THE MARBLE PIERS.
"OH, IT IS BEAUTIFUL!"

"AND MORE BEAUTIFUL STILL, ONCE YOU WALK AMONGST IT'S WONDERS. SEE THE BANNERS YONDER, ACROSS THE WATER? THERE YOUR MOTHER AWAITS YOUR HOMECOMING."

"FAREWELL, MY PRINCESS, MY LOVE TO YOUR FAMILY."
"YOU COME NO FARTHER?"
"NO, I MUST RETURN HOME, THE FIRE NEEDS WATCHING AND I MUST NOT NEGLECT MY GARDENING."



CLOSER TO THE PALACE AND FURTHER FROM THE DOCK, AND THE PRINCESS LOOKED BACK NO MORE.



THE BOAT SET SAIL AND WAS OFF WITH THE WIND. "FAREWELL, GOOD CLOVER, FAREWELL."

"FLOWERS GROW AROUND THE PALACE," CLOVER THE GARDENER MUSED TO HIMSELF, "MANY MORE AROUND THE WALL, BUT IN ALL THEIR EARTHLY BEAUTY, SHE'LL BE THE FAIREST OF THEM ALL."

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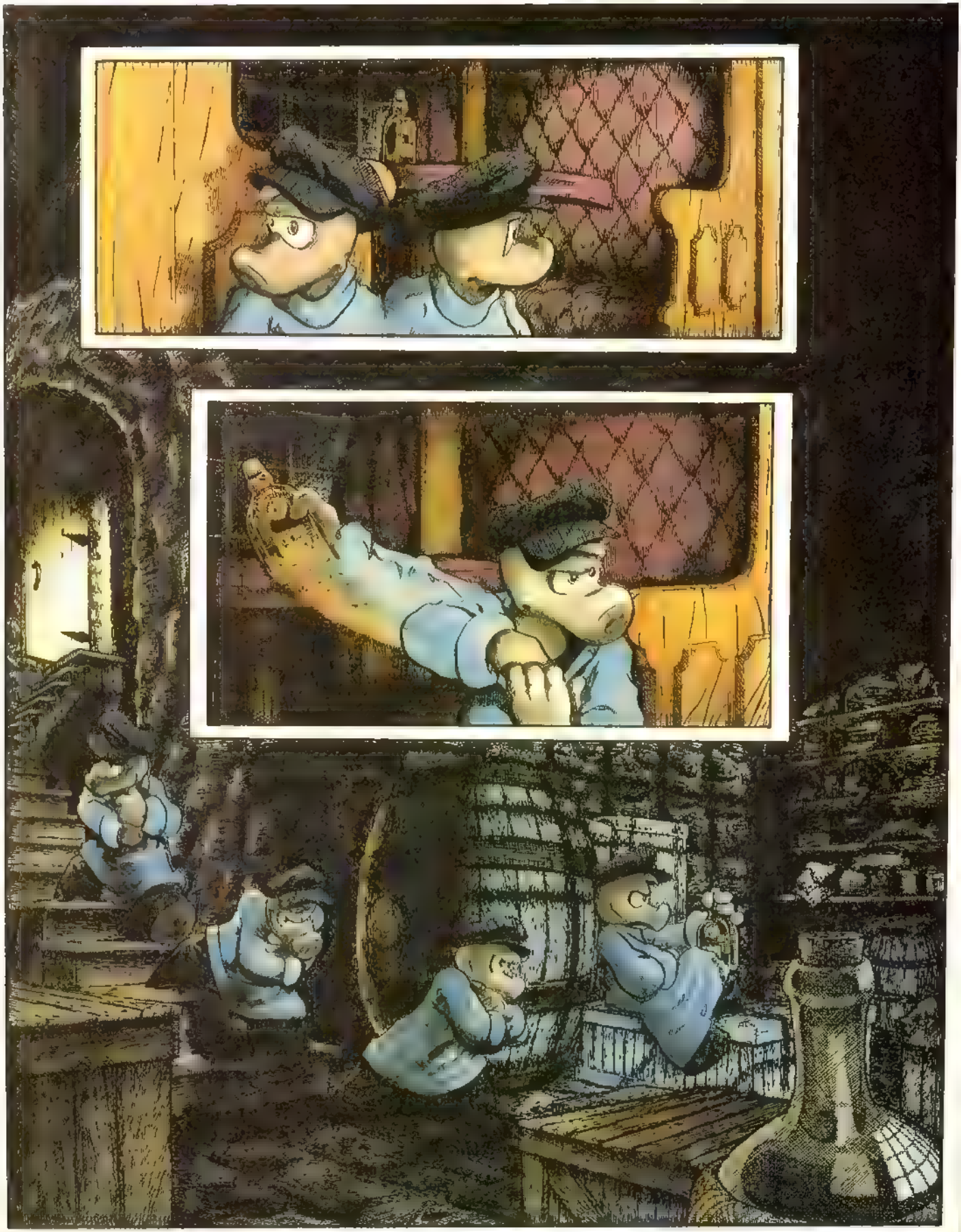

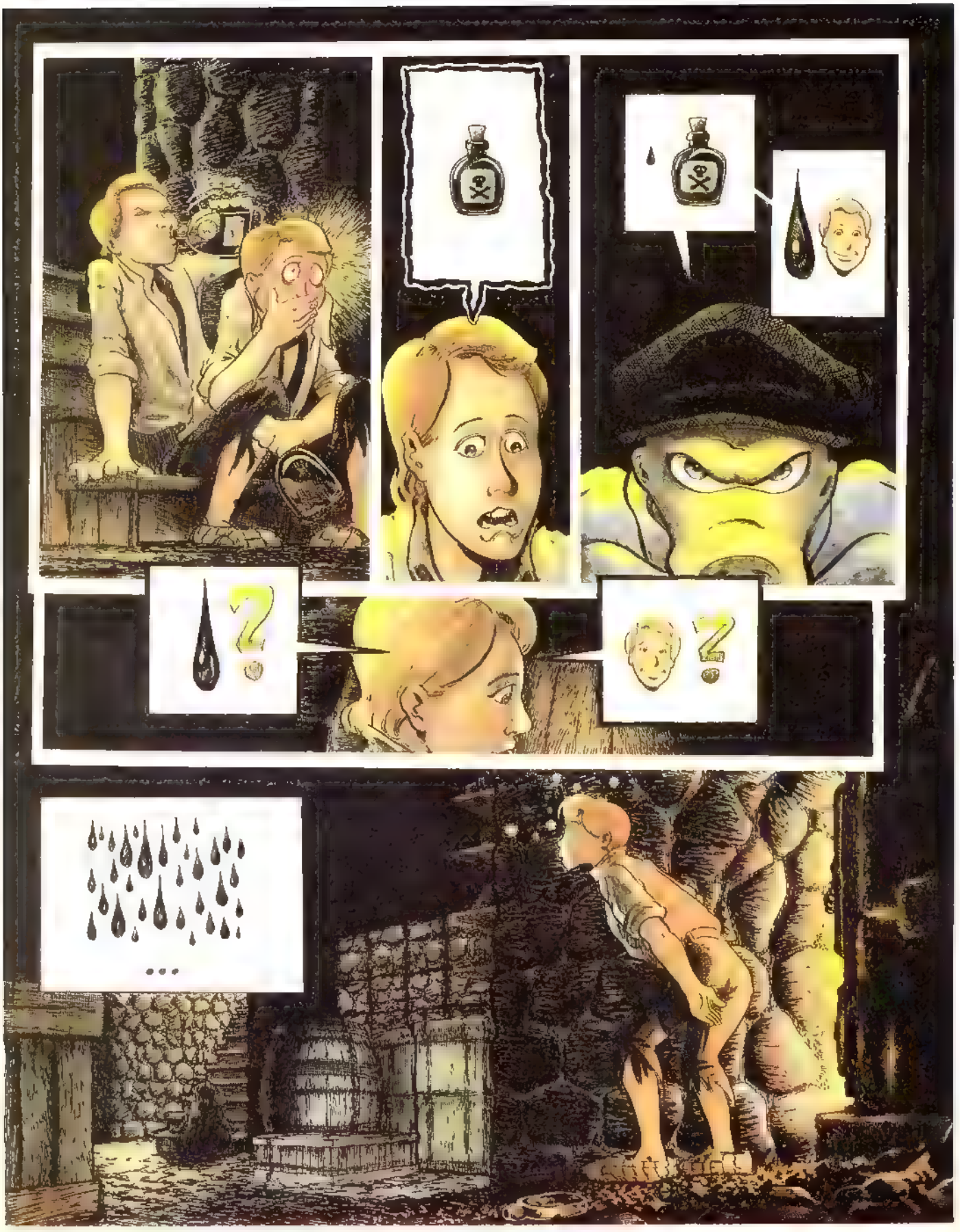

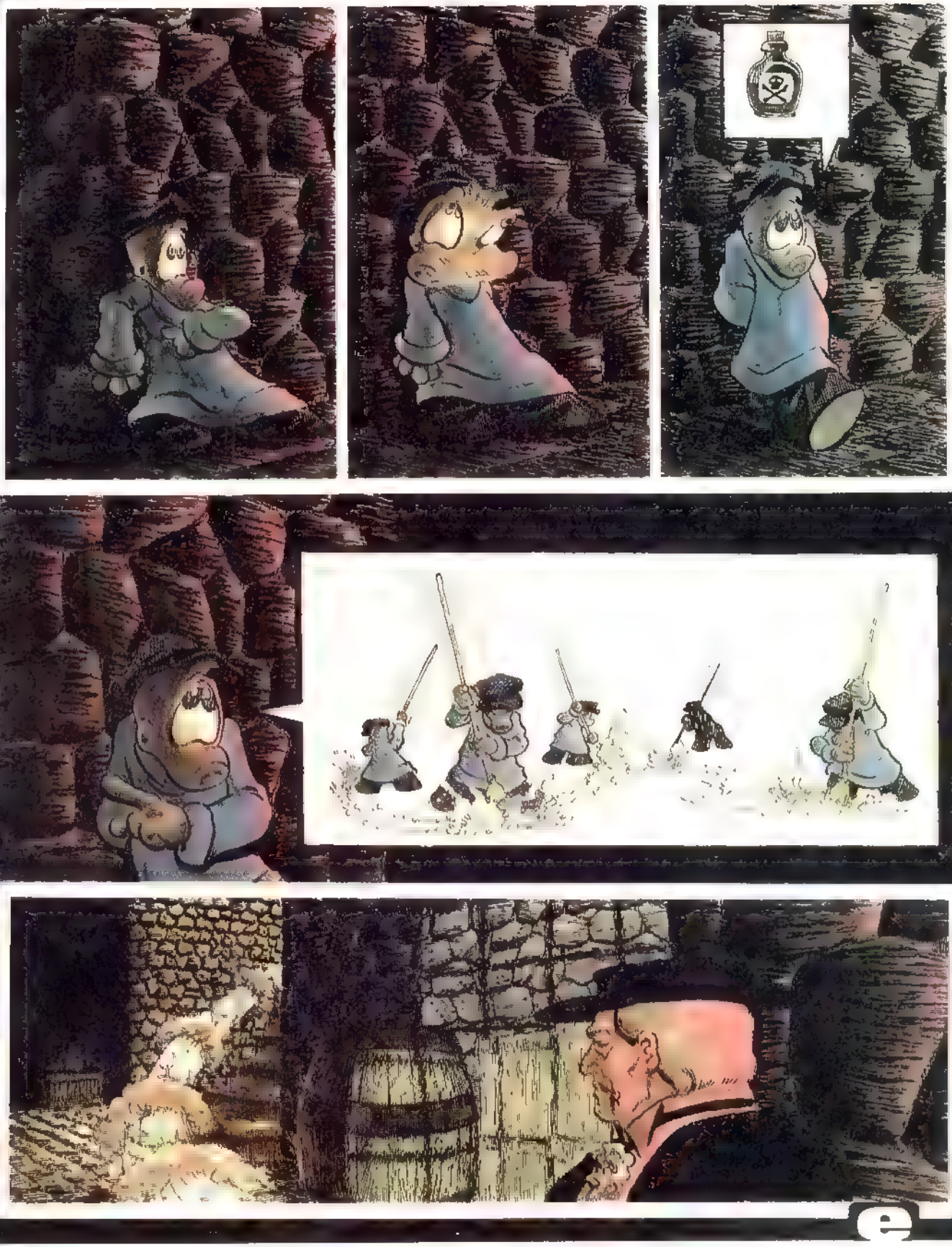

THE LAST GALACTUS STORY

CHAPTER ONE
THE SHATTERED STARS

IN THE BEGINNING WAS DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS WAS WITHOUT FORM, AND VOID; UNTIL THE GREAT LIGHT BURST FORTH UPON THE FACE OF THE NIGHT, AND THE DARKNESS WAS FOREVER CHANGED

THE TIME OF THAT GREAT BIRTHING IS LONG PAST. THE LIGHTS DANCE ACROSS THE GREAT EMPTINESS, SPEEDING ACROSS INFINITE SPACE, SPREADING OUT FROM CENTER.

THESE ARE NOT STARS. THESE ARE WHOLE GALAXIES, VAST SWIRLING POOLS OF A BILLION, TEN BILLION, A HUNDRED BILLION SUNS.

GREAT WHEELS OF ICY FLAME, THEY ROLL ACROSS THE BLACK, EMPTY SKY, DEFINING WITH THEIR MOVEMENTS THE SHAPE AND SUBSTANCE OF A UNIVERSE.

OUR UNIVERSE.

BUT, ALL IS NOT AS IT SHOULD BE.

ALL IS NOT WELL WITH THE UNIVERSE.

WRITTEN AND PENCILED BY
JOHN BYRNE
INKED BY TERRY AUSTIN
LETTERED BY JIM NOVAK
COLORED BY GLYNIS WEIN

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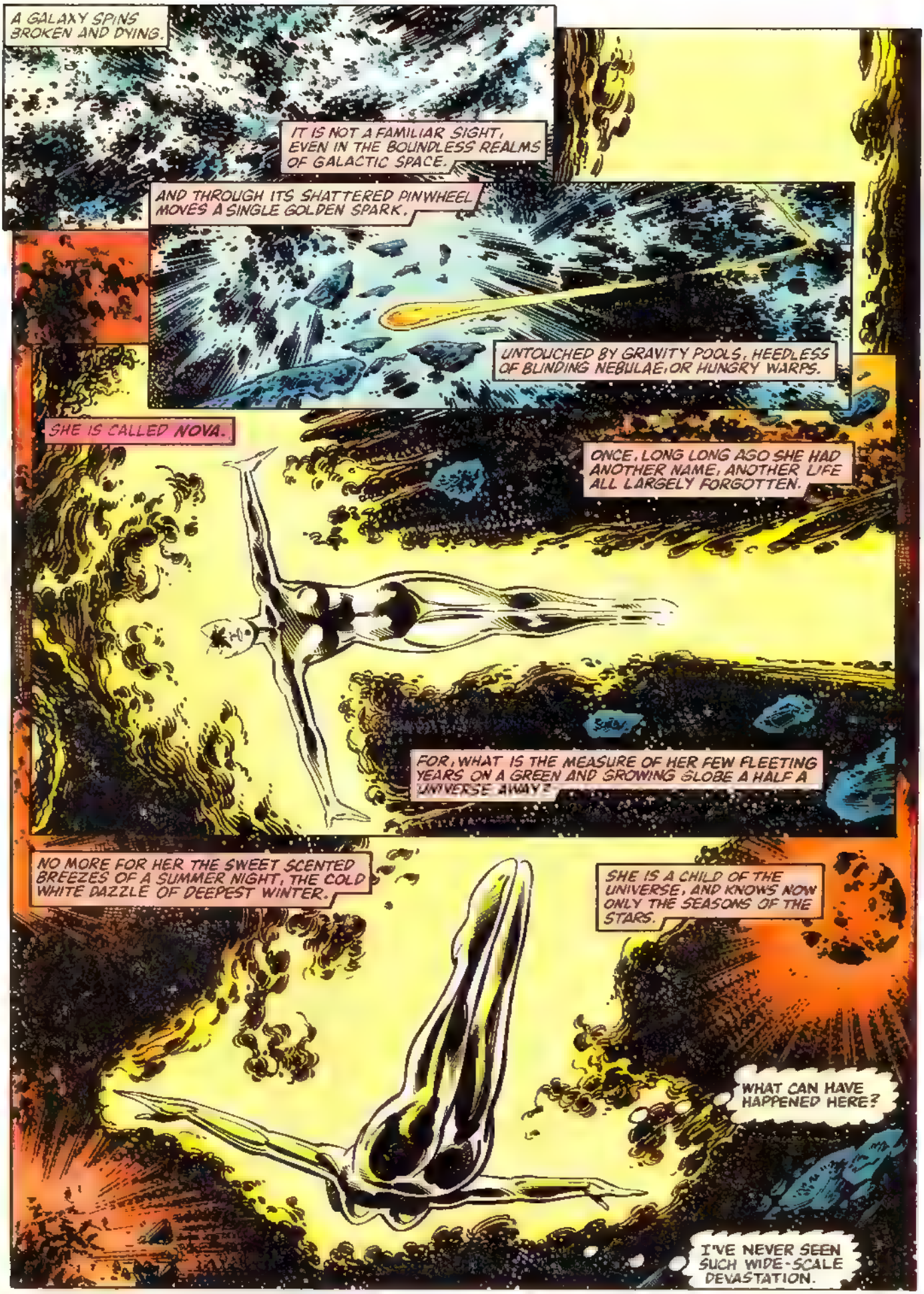
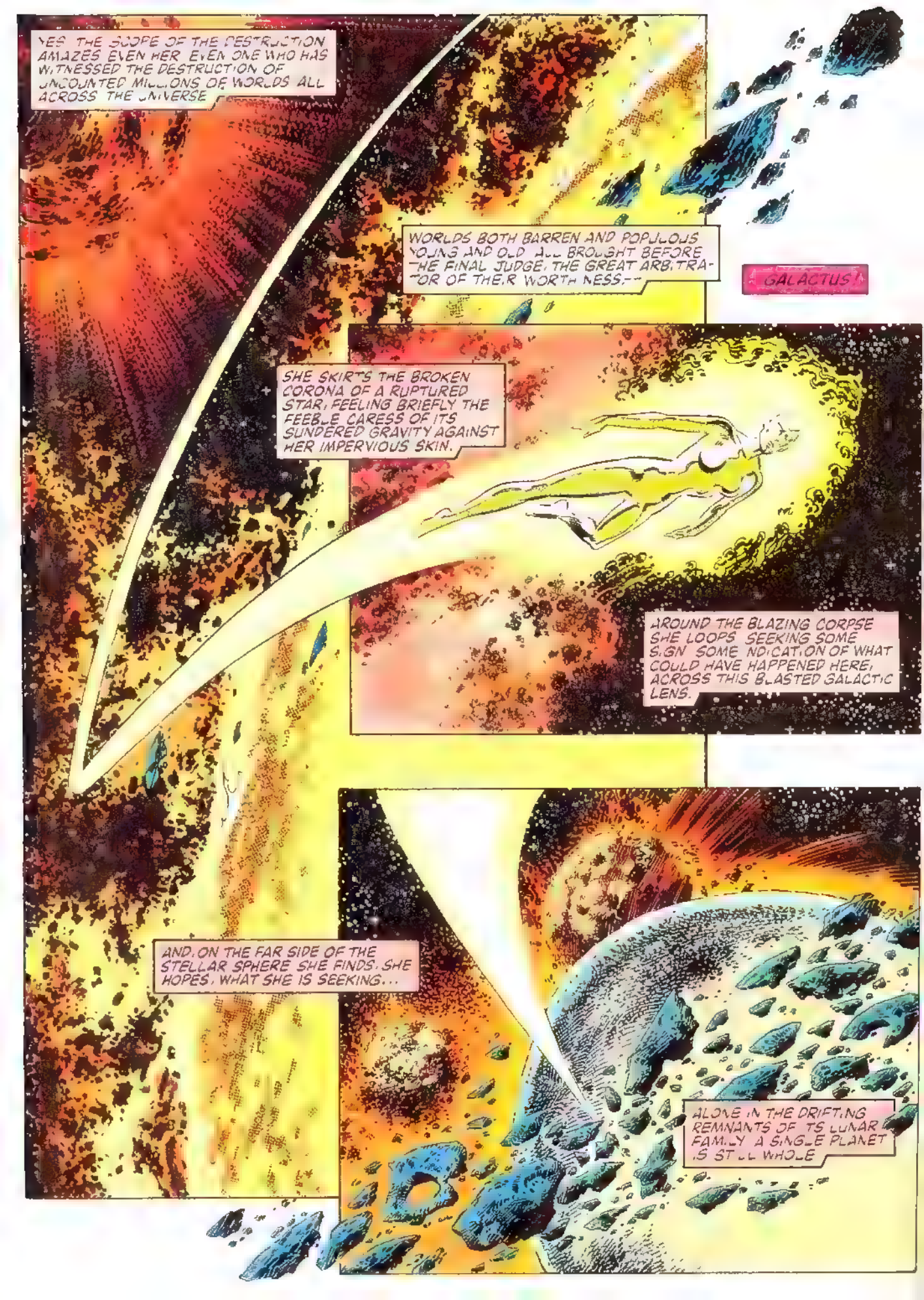

A GALAXY SPINS BROKEN AND DYING.
IT IS NOT A FAMILIAR SIGHT, EVEN IN THE BOUNDLESS REALMS OF GALACTIC SPACE.
AND THROUGH ITS SHATTERED PINWHEEL MOVES A SINGLE GOLDEN SPARK.
UNTOUCHED BY GRAVITY POOLS, HEEDLESS OF BLINDING NEBULAE, OR HUNGRY WARPS.
SHE IS CALLED NOVA.
ONCE, LONG LONG AGO SHE HAD ANOTHER NAME, ANOTHER LIFE ALL LARGELY FORGOTTEN.
FOR, WHAT IS THE MEASURE OF HER FEW FLEETING YEARS ON A GREEN AND GROWING GLOBE A HALF A UNIVERSE AWAY?
NO MORE FOR HER THE SWEET SCENTED BREEZES OF A SUMMER NIGHT, THE COLD WHITE DAZZLE OF DEEPEST WINTER.
SHE IS A CHILD OF THE UNIVERSE, AND KNOWS NOW ONLY THE SEASONS OF THE STARS.
WHAT CAN HAVE HAPPENED HERE?
I'VE NEVER SEEN SUCH WIDE-SCALE DEVASTATION.


YES. THE SCOPE OF THE DESTRUCTION AMAZES EVEN HER. EVEN ONE WHO HAS WITNESSED THE DESTRUCTION OF UNCOUNTED MILLIONS OF WORLDS ALL ACROSS THE UNIVERSE
WORLDS BOTH BARREN AND POPULOUS YOUNG AND OLD ALL BROUGHT BEFORE THE FINAL JUDGE, THE GREAT ARBITRATOR OF THEIR WORTHINESS--
GALACTUS!
SHE SKIRTS THE BROKEN CORONA OF A RUPTURED STAR, FEELING BRIEFLY THE FEEBLE CARESS OF ITS SUNDERED GRAVITY AGAINST HER IMPERVIOUS SKIN.
AROUND THE BLAZING CORPSE SHE LOOPS SEEKING SOME SIGN SOME INDICATION OF WHAT COULD HAVE HAPPENED HERE, ACROSS THIS BLASTED GALACTIC LENS.
AND, ON THE FAR SIDE OF THE STELLAR SPHERE SHE FINDS. SHE HOPES, WHAT SHE IS SEEKING...
ALONE IN THE DRIFTING REMNANTS OF ITS LUNAR FAMILY A SINGLE PLANET IS STILL WHOLE

BUT AS SHE HURTLES FROM THE BRINK OF SPACE SHE WONDERS...
ROILING DUST CLOUDS PILE HIGH AGAINST THE SWOLLEN STARS. IF THE LOST CLOAK OF HER HUMANITY WERE STILL ABOUT HER SHE WOULD CHOKE IN THIS BEFOULED AIR
THE VISTA SPREAD BENEATH THE CLOUDS OFFERS LITTLE VARIATION. THE LAND IS CRACKED AND DRY LIKE THE PARCHMENT SKIN OF A THOUSAND-YEAR-OLD MAN.
THEN...
LIKE THE SUDDEN BONES OF SOME WAYWARD TRAVELLER COME UPON IN A TRACKLESS WASTE OF DESERT THE TOWERS CLAW THE AMBER SKY.

LIKE THEIR WORLD THEY ARE BROKEN THINGS CRUDE CARICATURES OF THEIR ONCE MAJESTIC SPLENDOR
BUT NOVA KNOWS THEM INSTANTLY FOR WHAT THEY WERE
SPACESHIPS! THOUSANDS, MAYBE MILLIONS OF THEM! BUILDING SO MANY MUST HAVE DRAINED THE RESOURCES OF THE WHOLE SYSTEM. ENOUGH MAYBE TO CARRY OFF THE POPULATION OF THE ENTIRE PLANET.
BUT...THEY ALL SEEM TO BE HERE. ALL THE SHIPS STILL IN THEIR LAUNCH BAYS AT LEAST, I SEE NO SIGN OF ANYTHING LIKE AN EMPTY GANTRY
ALL THESE SHIPS AND NOT ONE ESCAPED THE DESTRUCTION?
AND THERE'S SOMETHING ELSE. IT WASN'T UNTIL I SAW THIS FRAGMENT OF CIVILIZATION THAT I REALIZE A BIG PIECE OF THE PUZZLE IS MISSING.
PEOPLE! THERE'S NO SIGN OF PEOPLE ANYWHERE. I SENSE NO LIFE OF ANY KIND ON THIS WHOLE WORLD. AND YET, I SEE NO BODIES EITHER. NOT EVEN TRACES.
IT'S UNLIKELY THAT THE BEINGS WHO ONCE LIVED HERE HAD BODIES THAT WOULD LEAVE NO MORTAL REMAINS. THE DESIGN OF THESE SHIPS AND SUPPORTING STRUCTURES SUGGESTS CREATURES WHO WERE HUMANOID, OR SOMETHING VERY CLOSE TO IT

STYG AN DARKNESS CLOSES ABOUT HER AS SHE ENTERS THE RUINED STRUCTURE BLACKNESS SO ABSOLUTE IT THREATENS TO SMOTHER EVEN HER OWN ETERNAL FLAME
DARKNESS THAT CARRIES VAST AGE UPON ITS SLOW AND HEAVY AIR WHISPERING OF GHOSTS AND THINGS BEST LEFT UNSEEN
SHE HAS SEEN THE FARTHEST REACHES OF THE UNIVERSE ALL ITS WONDERS AND ITS TERRORS
..YET EVEN SHE MUST SUPPRESS A SHUDDER OF FEAR AS THE OPPRESSIVE DARKNESS WORKS ITS MISCHIEF ON HER HIDDEN HUMAN SOUL.
STILL SHE DOES NOT TURN BACK AND FOR HER EFFORTS IS REWARDED AFTER A FASHION...
THIS DOOR WAS BUILT TO LAST EONS. BUILT TO PROTECT SOMETHING
PERHAPS THE ANSWER?

TO BE CONTINUED

TOADSWART

SYNOPSIS

"What is this Darkness, this consummate Evil pervading all . . . the now forsaken castle chambers . . . the landscapes and villages beyond?" So in the year 982 A.D., from a lonely cell, contemplates the dwarf Toadswart, retainer of Castle Amplestone.

Had it commenced with the mysterious disappearance of the castle's old Lord? Certainly this affected his heir and regent, Prince Waxroth. Suspecting the country's ruler, the King of the First Dominion, of treachery and designs upon Amplestone province, Waxroth instituted a policy of oppression and cruel taxation to support a secret defense project, at which he obsessively labored in the castle's subterranean chambers.

But if precise beginnings of the Tragedy are vague in Toadswart's memory, not so the event which signaled its final act . . . the arrival of an itinerant journeyer, Shamshadow, painter of portraits.

Though strangers were unwelcome, this wanderer seemed almost expected by Waxwroth and his uneasy Counselor, Bitterburr. To the suspicion of the old Lord's magician, Lacknose, the painter was commissioned to do portraits of the royal family — Waxwroth, his son, Rupert, and wife, Adriana — on the occasion of the boy's investiture, which would also validate Waxwroth as Lord of Amplestone.

Shamshadow accepted, then learned the fate of his predecessor, Bristle, who had plunged from a castle window to his death. Suicide. Or perhaps, Lacknose hinted, murder . . .

d'AMPLESTONE

A·GOTHIC·TALE of HORROR·&·MAGICK

BY·TIM·A·CONRAD

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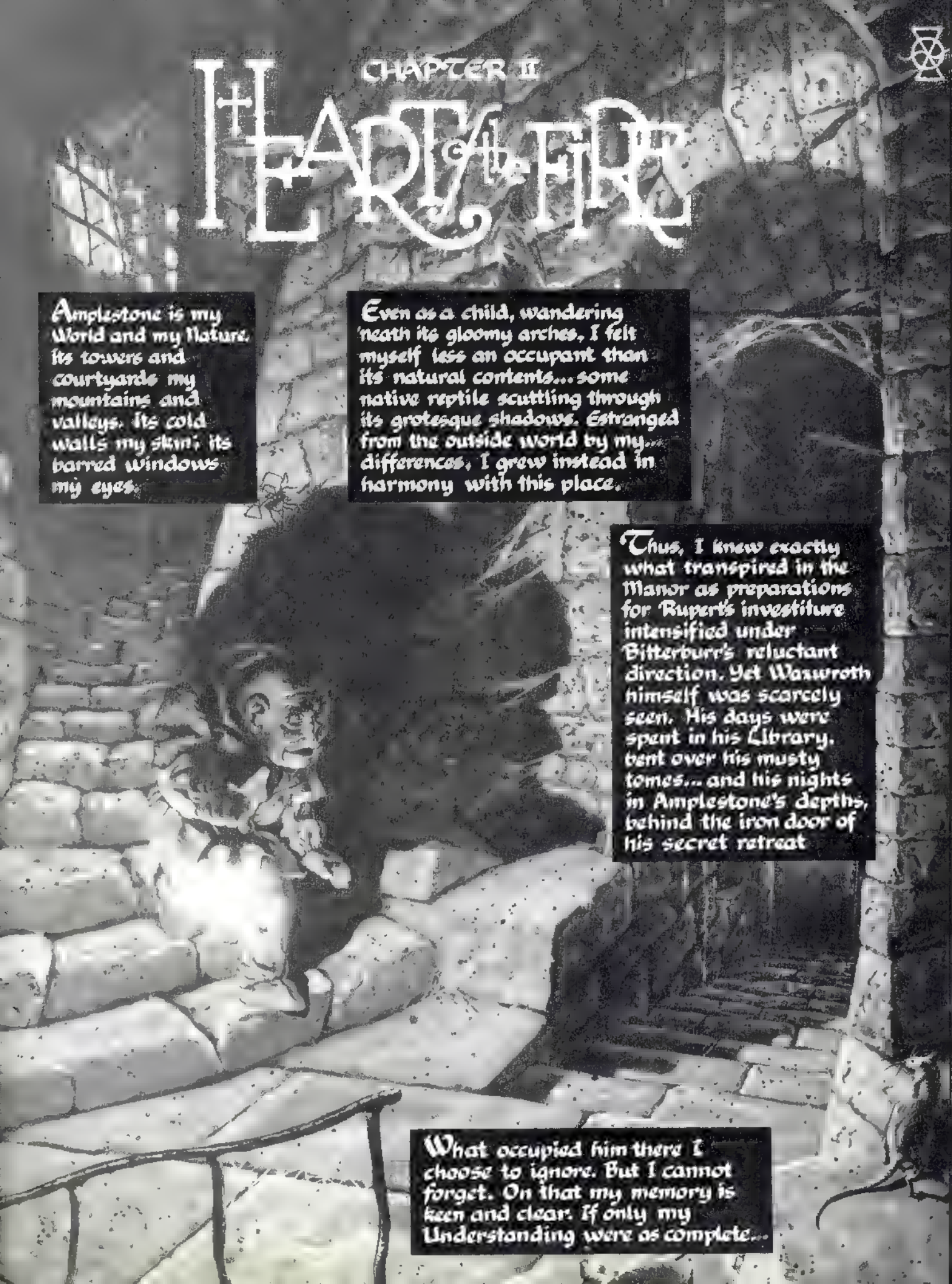

CHAPTER II
HEART of FIRE
Amplestone is my World and my Nature. Its towers and courtyards my mountains and valleys. Its cold walls my skin; its barred windows my eyes.
Even as a child, wandering 'neath its gloomy arches, I felt myself less an occupant than its natural contents... some native reptile scuttling through its grotesque shadows. Estranged from the outside world by my... differences, I grew instead in harmony with this place.
Thus, I knew exactly what transpired in the Manor as preparations for Rupert's investiture intensified under Bitterburr's reluctant direction. Yet Waxwroth himself was scarcely seen. His days were spent in his Library, bent over his musty tomes... and his nights in Amplestone's depths, behind the iron door of his secret retreat
What occupied him there I choose to ignore. But I cannot forget. On that my memory is keen and clear. If only my Understanding were as complete...

It smelled of hot oil and blood down there, of stagnant swamps and caustic solutions. A Black Fall descended upon my Spirit with each step I took.
SO YOU SEE, BITTERBURR, EVEN THE KING WILL FORTHWITH HESITATE TO MEDDLE WITH THE OAK OF AMPLESTONE.
A BIT MORE TO THE LEFT... THERE!
MY LIEGE I DO *NOT* SEE... ANYTHING MORE THAN THIS HUGE AND HIDEOUS MOCKERY OF A MAN.
YOU DO NOT SEE BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT *LOOK!* THIS IS *TRUTH!* A MASS OF FILTH AND CLAY...
...BOUND WITH IRON AND ROPE. ARE THE FLESH AND BOWELS, THE BONE AND SINEW, ANY *MORE* THAN THAT?
THERE IS VITALITY IN A MAN, SIRE...THE BREATH OF LIFE, THE ANIMATION OF A SOUL!
THERE IS DESIRE, COUNSELOR... HATRED AND GREED... MOVED ONLY BY THE FEAR OF DEATH.
AND COMPASSION... AND GENEROSITY. THERE IS... HOPE.

HOPE FOR WHAT, YOU DAMN FOOL? TO WHAT END BE KIND... BE GENEROUS? THAT THE WORMS GROW LESS FAT ON THE CORPSE OF A SAINT THAN A SINNER?
A MAN NEEDS STRENGTH, NOT SENTIMENT, TO HOLD HIS OWN AGAINST PILLAGE AND MURDER. POWER, BITTERBURR! MAN IS INSPIRED BY POWER... NOT VIRTUE!
WHAT POWER IS THERE, LORD WAXWROTH, IN THIS LIFELESS THING OF MUD?
MY POWER! ALL THE FORCE OF MY WILL... UNFETTERED AND INVULNERABLE... WITH THE MIGHT TO DESTROY ALL WHO WOULD OPPOSE ME!
AGAIN, MY LORD... I DO NOT SEE. AND I AM LOOKING.
YOU SHALL BE SHOWN, COUNSELOR! BUT NOT BEFORE ONE OTHER WITNESSES MY TRIUMPH. TOADSWART! FETCH THE MAGICIAN!

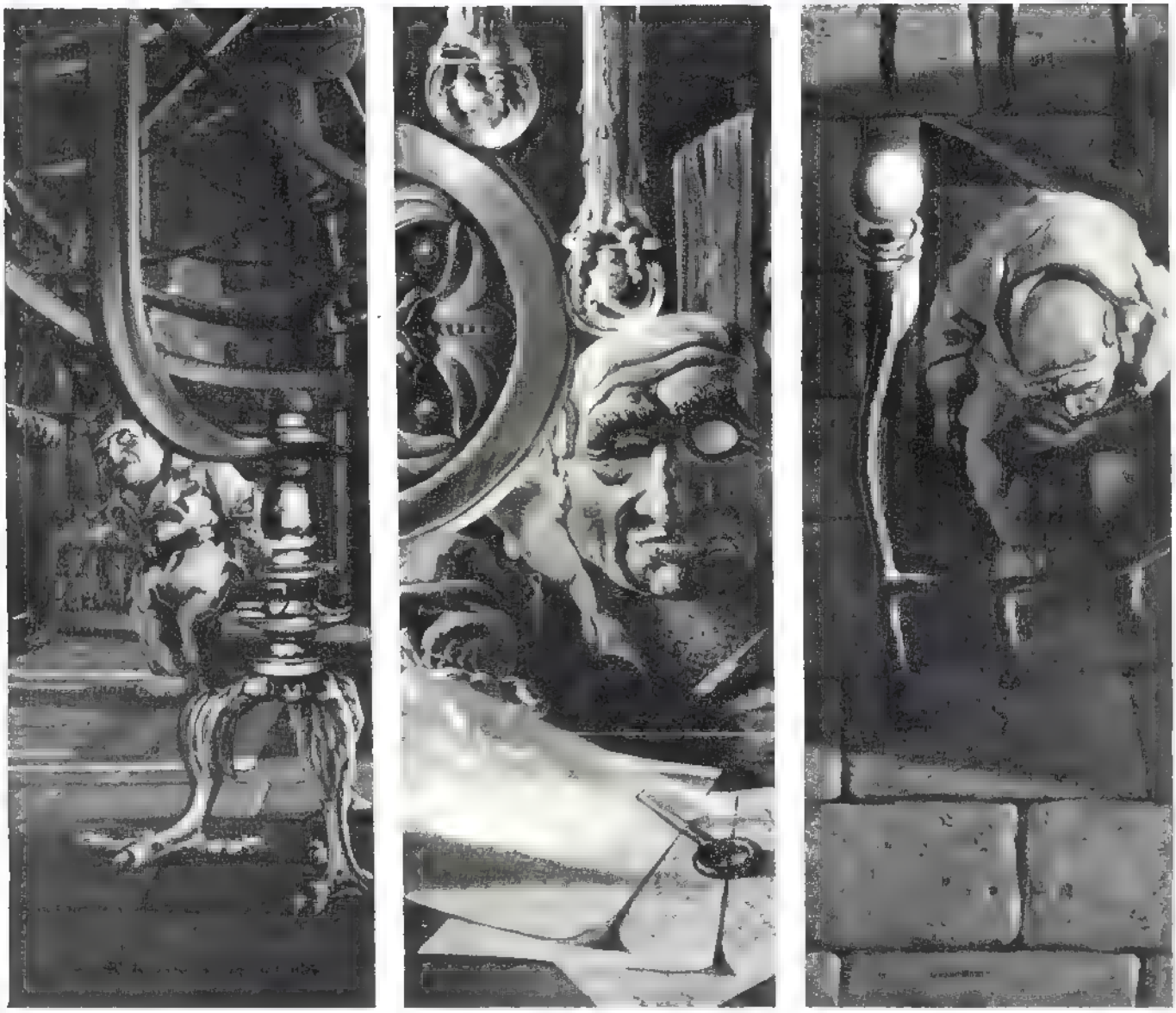
Lacknose dwelt in a small tower overhanging Amplestone's stables. The old fool himself had christened this tower "The Dunce Cap."

The sun was drawing down the Westward sky as I mounted the final step to the Wizard's Keep...

...and banged away at the oaken timbers and iron ornaments barring entrance. The heavy door swung silently inward at my blows. Just as quietly, I entered the humble living quarters of our old Lord's magician and astrologer. They were dominated by a curious iron ladder twisting upward to Lacknose's study. I knew by then, of course, he was not in... neither below nor above.

But by chance, I reasoned, some small clue to his whereabouts might be found in the upper chamber, which nestled under the very eaves of the Cap itself.

It was immediately apparent that here—rather than the meanly provisioned room below—was where Lacknose truly lived... amid devices and tools the like of which I could not begin to fathom, even if my head had *not* been spinning from the dizzying effect of that winding climb.



Hoping for some sign amongst the clutter on his desk, I reached out to take up some papers he had written. Suddenly--carried on the sun's last beams, sparkling before my very eyes--a living miniature rainbow gliffered.

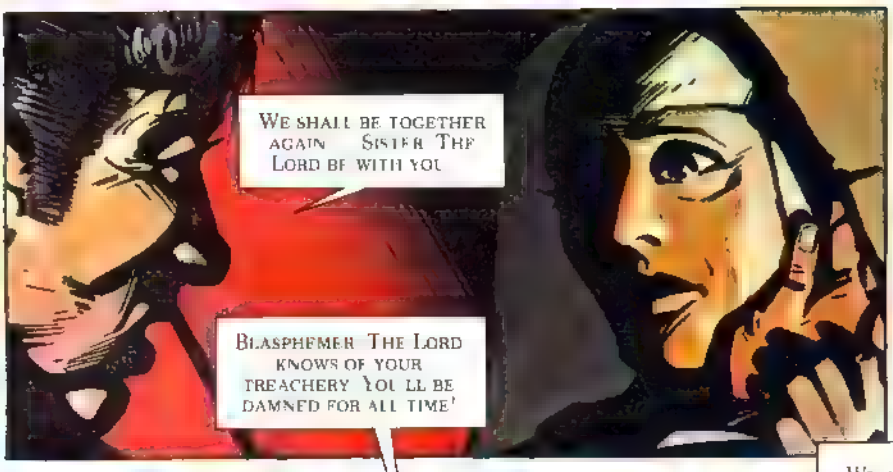
The brilliant Hues of this unexpected and inexplicable Magick turned my mind at once to Shamshadow the Painter. He had begun his portrait of young Prince Rupert. Lacknose, the boy's friend and tutor, might well be in attendance while the artist worked.

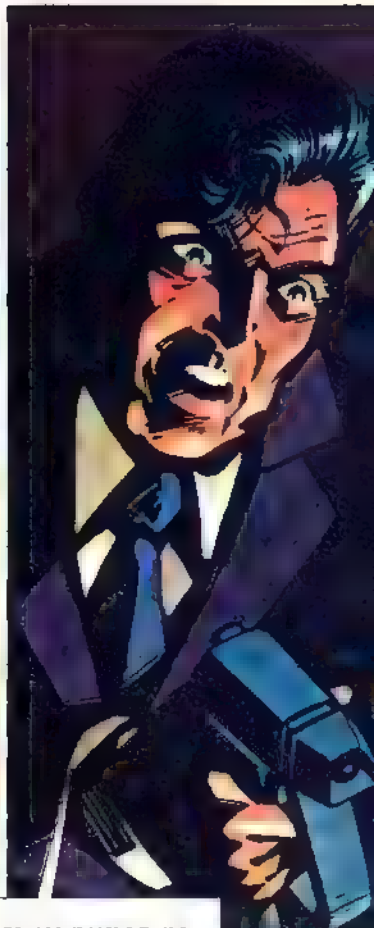
Shamshadow, too, had his place in Prince Waxwroth's machinations, even as did the rest of Amplestone Province. And, like the rest of us—

...he also labored in ignorance of the Prince's grand design. Still, as I walked, I pondered. Was this ignorance about to be dispelled? Was Waxwroth drawing together the many strands of his devious web?

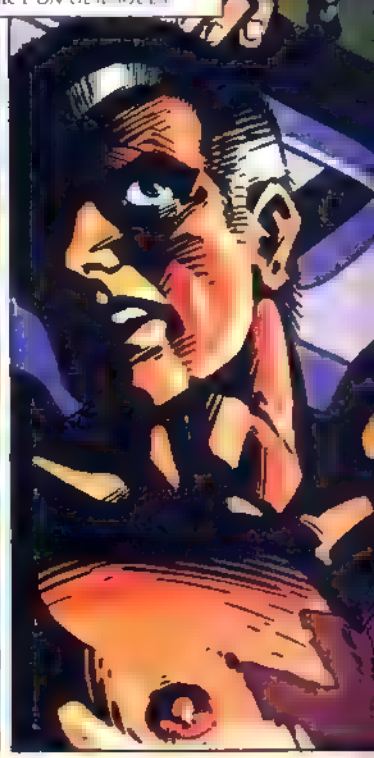
...ALL BUT FINISHED, LACKNOSE. MY THANKS FOR YOUR AID IN REASSURING PRINCE RUPERT. NOW IF YOU COULD AS READILY FACILITATE MY PRESENTATION TO HIS *MOTHER*...MY SERVICE COULD CONTINUE.
PRINCESS ADRIANA IS NOT WELL. THEY SAY THE CLIME HERE AT AMPLESTONE DISRUPTS HER HUMORS.
HOW ODD... FATHER PRETENSE RINGS THE CHAPEL BELLS.

TOADSWART continues on page 75


WE SHALL BE TOGETHER AGAIN SISTER THE LORD BE WITH YOU
BLASPHEMER THE LORD KNOWS OF YOUR TREACHERY YOU LL BE DAMNED FOR ALL TIME!

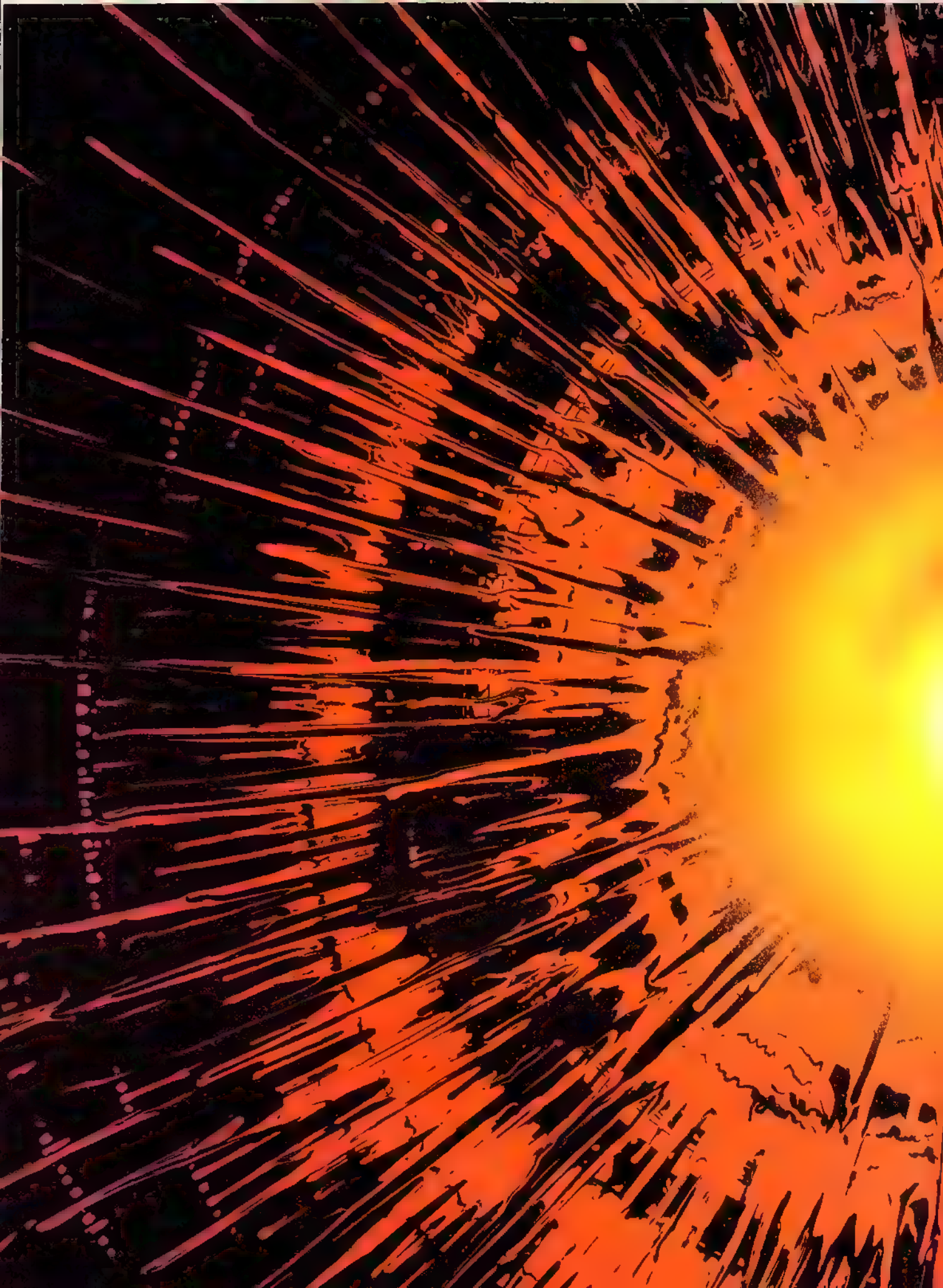


WE ARE ALL DAMNED WE WERE DAMNED THE MOMENT WE LEFT THE SOIL OF EARTH THE BLASPHEMY WAS N ASSUMING THE GUISE OF ANGELS MAY GOD HAVE MERCY ON OUR SOULS



EMERGENCY EVACUATION ... ... ATTENTION: AUTO DESTRUC

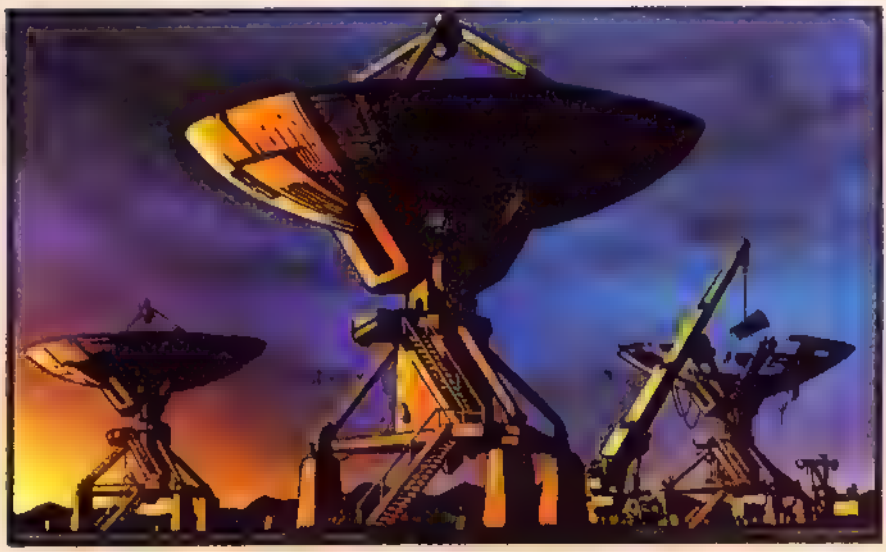
ARMED AND DANGEROUS
MEMBRANE BREACHED
MEMBRANE BREACHED
MEMBRANE SEALED
THE LORD IS MY SHEPHERD I SHALL NOT WANT —
SEQUENCE ENGAGED... 1 MINUTE AND COUNTING..



MY GOD JOAN SAINT CATHERINE S WE RE ALL THAT S LEFT!
IT CAN T BE

PRAY WITH ME, SISTER

All contact with the Saint Catherine's Mission and the Saint Mark's Mission of the Catholic Interstellar Crusade was lost in the fifth year of the enterprise. The third mission, Saint Joan's, was subsequently cancelled and the Crusade disassembled.



The air is not so full of flies in summer as it is at all times of invisible devils, this Paracelsus stiffly maintains, and that they have every one their several Chaos. If it be true that some of our Mathematicians say if a stone could fall from the starry heaven or eighth sphere and should pass every hour at hundred miles, it would be 65 years, or more, before it would come to ground, by reason of the great distance of heaven from earth, which contains, as some say 170 million 803 miles . . how many such spirits may it contain?

Robert Burton
17th century

FOR CATHERINE, JOAN ERIC, SABINA HOWARD AND ESPECIALLY ARCHIE
DEDICATED TO
THE MEMORY OF HERBERT MARSHALL MCLUHAN

MOTTER • STEACY

TOADSWART
Continued from page 66

THE GOOD PRIEST RANG THE BELLS AT DAWN, AS WELL. IS THIS A DAY OF SOME SIGNIFICANCE?
MOMENTOUS INDEED. MORE SO FOR SOME THAN OTHERS. BUT EVERYONE'S DAY COMES 'ROUND BY AND BY... NEVER TOO LATE AND NEVER EARLY.
THEN THE BELLS MUST TOLL FOR ONE OF US, MY FRIEND...FOR HERE APPEARS THE VERY MESSENGER OF DEATH!
YOU ARE WANTED BELOW BY THE PRINCE, LACKNOSE... AT ONCE!

AH, THE ARTIST'S SUBLIME PERCEPTION! YOU SPEAK MORE TRUTH THAN YOU INTEND, SHAMSHADOW.
I SPOKE IN JEST, I DID NOT--
YOU SHOULD JEST WHENEVER MORTALITY IS YOUR SUBJECT, LIFE, AND HOW ONE LIVES IT... THERE IS A SERIOUS CONCERN!
PAY MIND TO THAT, YOUNG FELLOW... AND EVEN DEATH WILL BE A FRIEND WHEN SURELY YOU MEET!

With these words, the Magician followed me...down, back down into Ampleforth's gloomy depths...where my Lord still lectured his doubting Counselor.

AND LACKNOSE HIMSELF--WHOSE WORD YOU DO REGARD--WILL CORROBORATE MY CLAIMS TO--
YOUR CLAIMS, WAXWROTH, ARE NO MORE DISPUTABL THAN YOUR STUPIDITY!
I'VE NO DOUBT THAT YOU HAVE THE KNOWLEDGE AND POWER TO ANIMATE THIS ARTLESS LUMP OF CLAY. WHY, IT SPEAKS TO ME EVEN NOW...OF A MAN SO FRIGHTENED OF DEATH, HE HAS TO FEAR LIFE. FOR FEAR OF DEATH MAKES A HORROR OF LIFE.
IT CRIES OF THE AGONY OF A MAN SHACKLED AND BOUND BY THE PHYSICAL LIMITATIONS OF BEING IMPOSED OUT OF IGNORANCE AND BLINDNESS.
MY WISDOM AND VISION ARE PERHAPS KEENER THAN YOU'D PREFER, OLD MAN...

...FOR I'VE LEARNED THE PRECIOUS SECRETS OF *YOUR* CRAFT. I HAVE FORGED AND FIRED MY OWN MEANS TO POWER AGAINST THE TREACHERY OF THE KING...OR ANY *OTHER* WHO WOULD DEFY ME.
YOU MAY HAVE UNEARTHED THE *MEANS*, YOU PRINCE OF FOOLS, BUT ITS *PURPOSE* YET ELUDES YOU.
I AM ITS PURPOSE... BECAUSE I CHOOSE TO WIELD IT! YOU KNOW WELL AS I, MAGUS, THESE TRINKETS ARE BUT A POINT OF FOCUS FOR OUR OWN DESIRES, MADE MANIFEST THROUGH WILL!
AND YOU KNOW THAT WILL IS FREE TO CHOOSE *WHICH* IT SERVES...YET BONDED SLAVE TO THOSE CHOSEN. *YOU* HAVE CHOSEN POWER AND SELF...
TO POWER AND SELF I LEAVE YOU THRALL.
WE SHALL *SEE* WHO IS IN THRALL TO WHOM, YOU POMPOUS ASS... BEFORE ANOTHER *NIGHT* IS GONE!

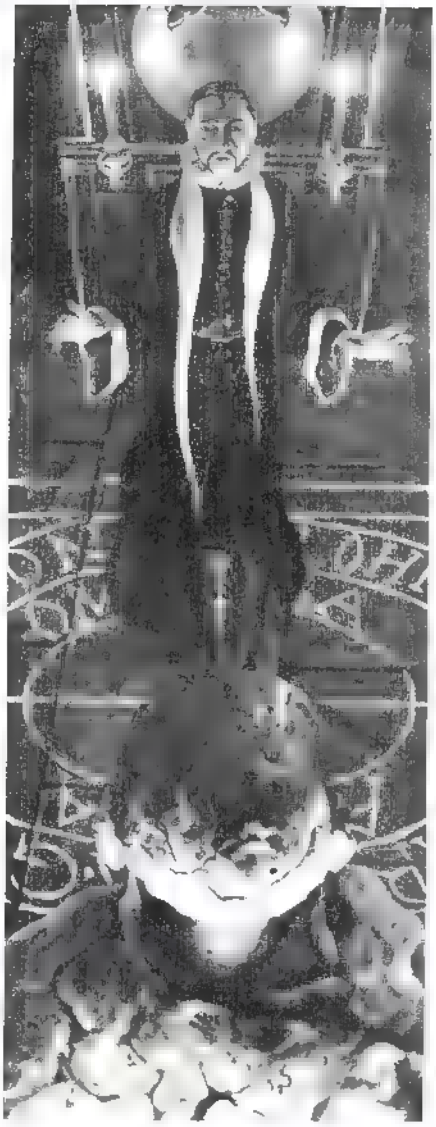
...in silent and surprising Defiance of the Prince, accompanied the Magician out of the Chamber.

But I remained behind, crouching in the shadows.

Though I had no need to fear discovery, so maniacally possessed was Waxwroth...

...with his meticulous and esoteric preparations.

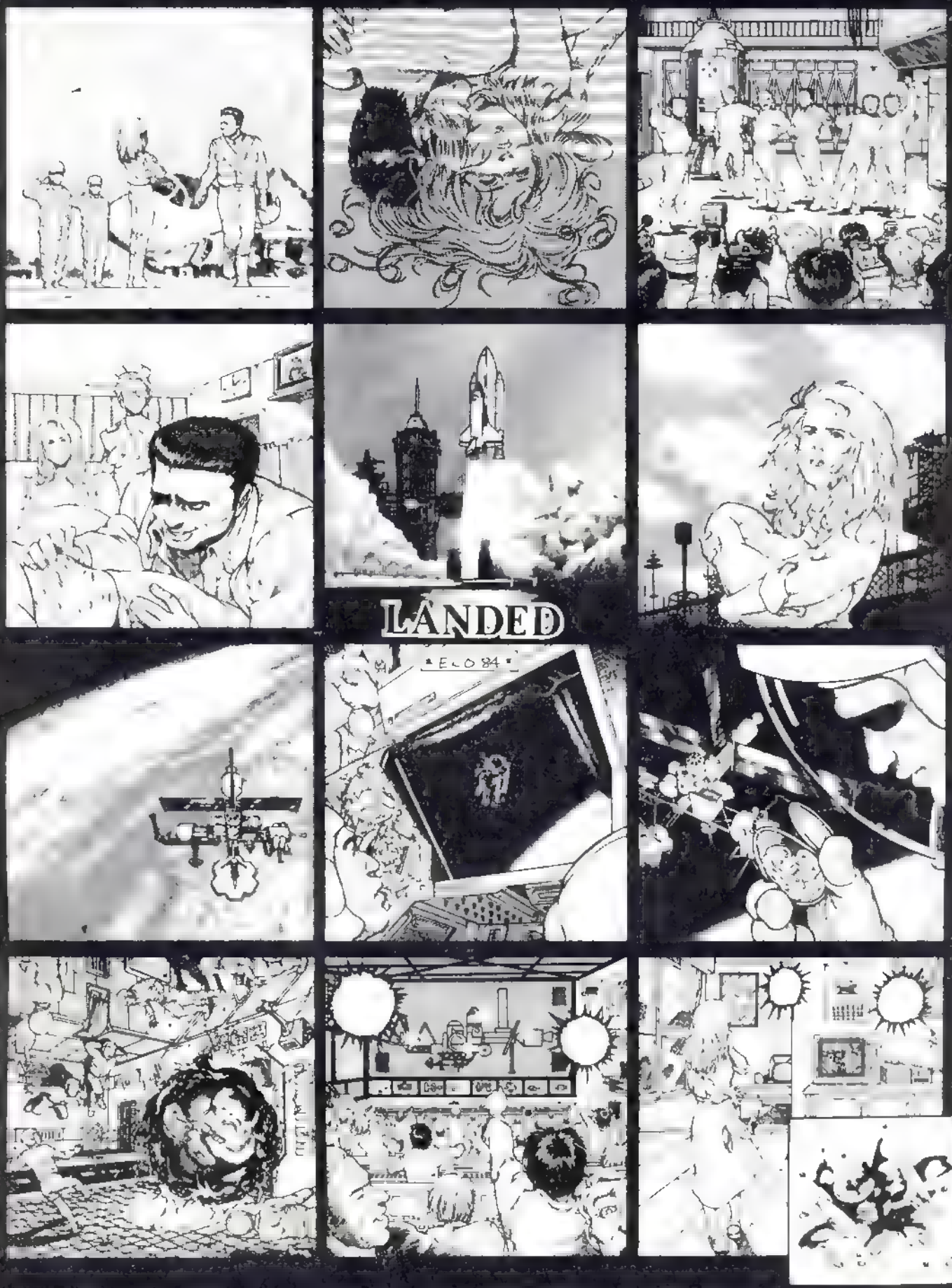
Then, he carefully draped the glowing amulet over the misshapen head of his Monstrous Mannikin...breathlessly slipped into a white-lined robe of purest black...and stepped into the Hub of his Cabbalistic Wheel! There, he commenced to murmur...



I would never repeat the horrid oaths and blasphemous incantations which then reverberated through the God-forsaken pit, even if I could remember them. But I cannot forget the hideous timber of Waxwroth's voice as the murmur rose to a violent bellow, producing unnatural vibrations in the very substance of the place.

Suddenly, all the Universe seemed to fracture, to splinter, and we were swept [illegible] Endless Shrieking Void...
A taunting howl of joy and pain, triumph and defeat, welled forth from those unimaginable depths...
...and I could not know if it was Waxwroth's Invocation... or some Hellish response!
But as the Awful Sound sank into a bone-piercing moan, I perceived flashes and sparks...
...in the heretofore vacant sockets of the statue's eyes! Then, I felt a dry and searing wind... and heard above the Abominable Din

IT MOVES!
IT MOVES!
IT MOVES!
IT MOVES!
NEXT: ALL the KING'S MEN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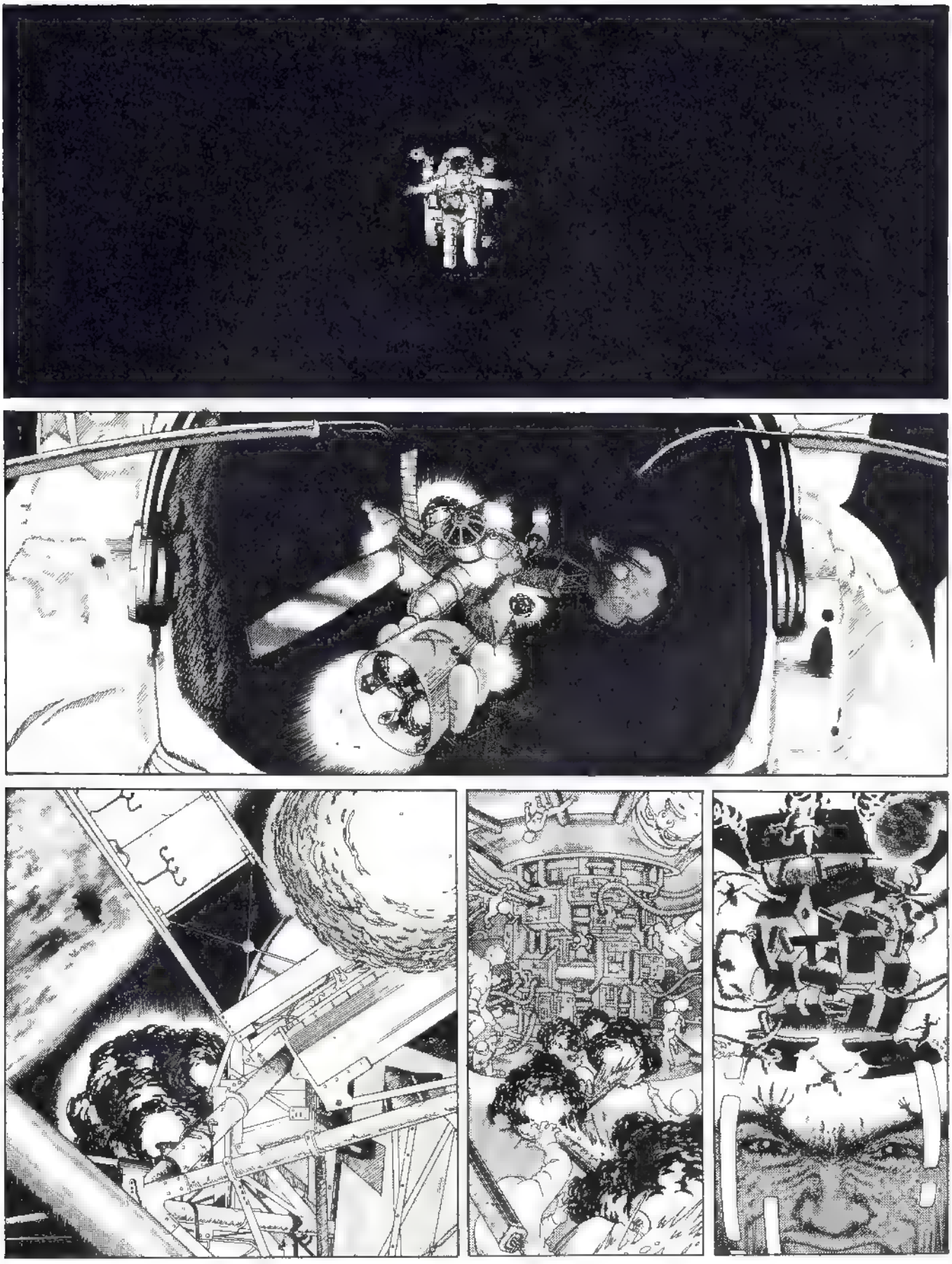
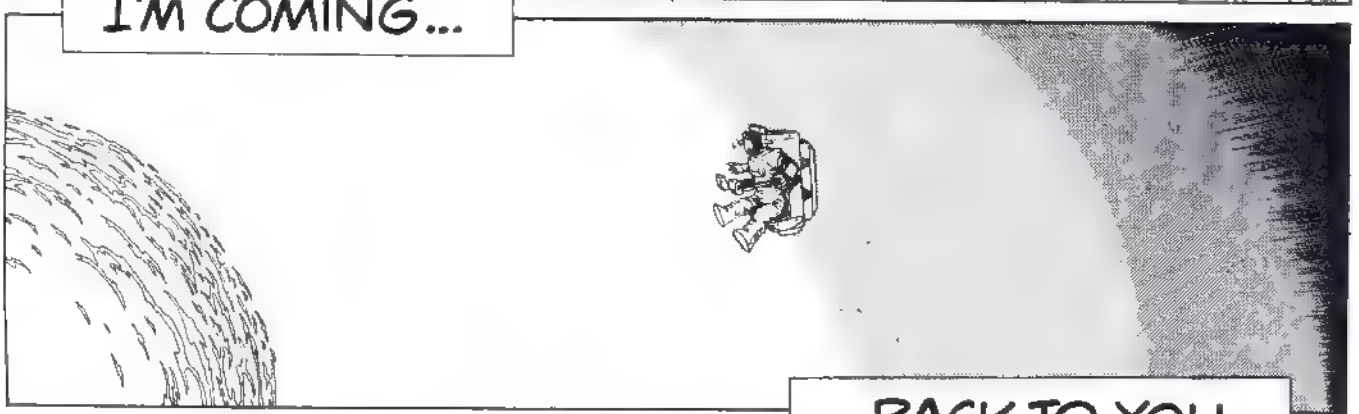
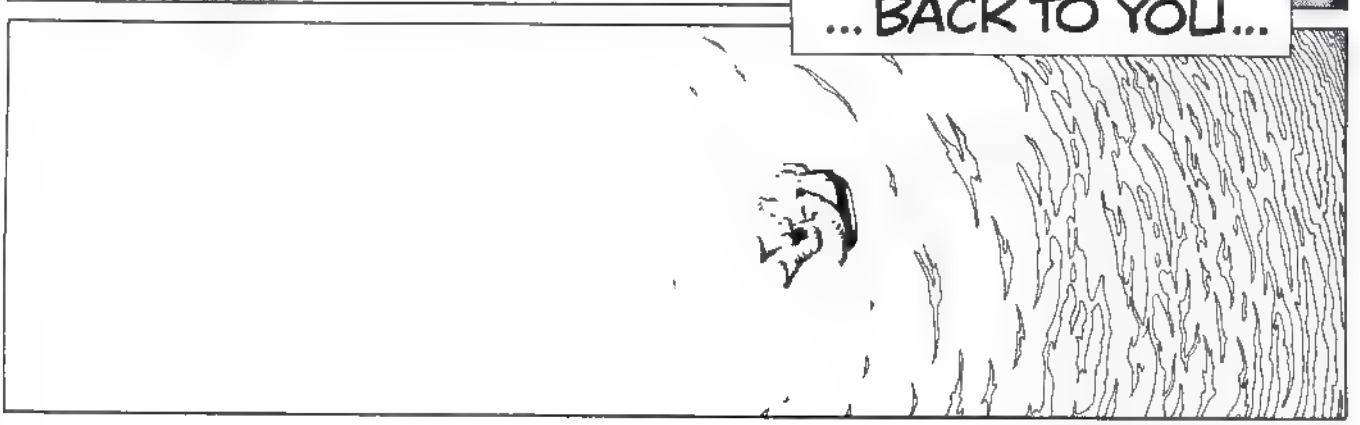
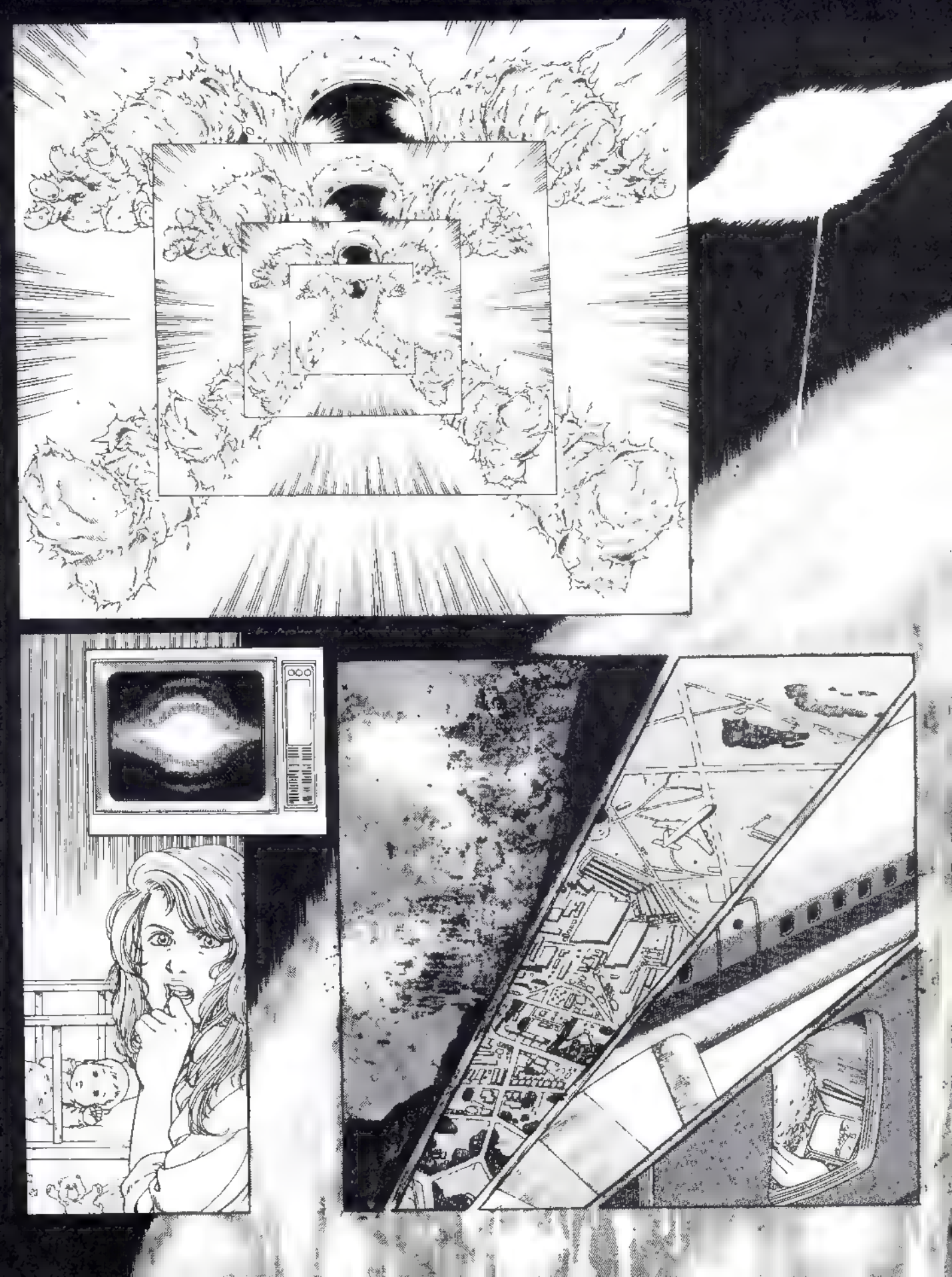


I'M COMING...

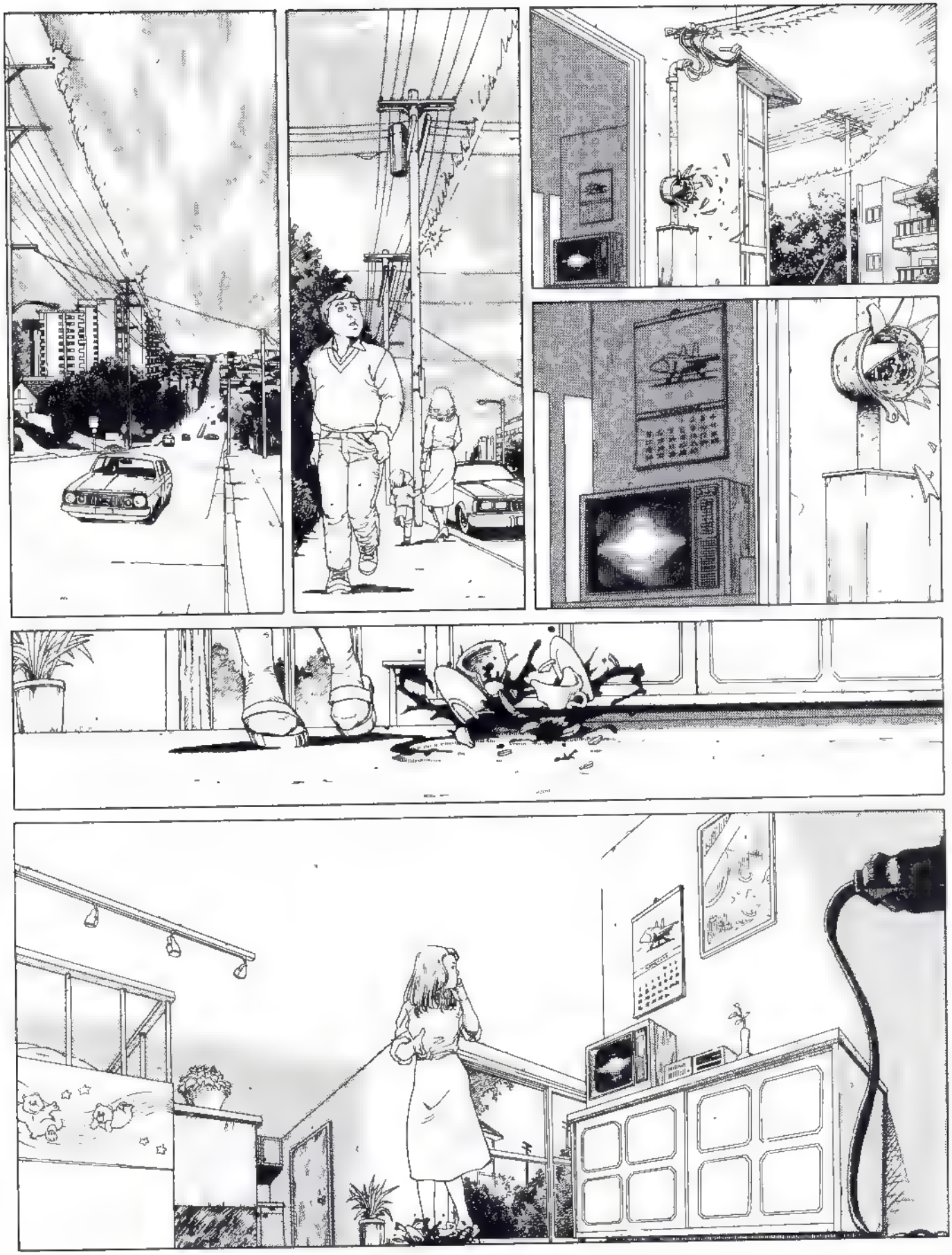


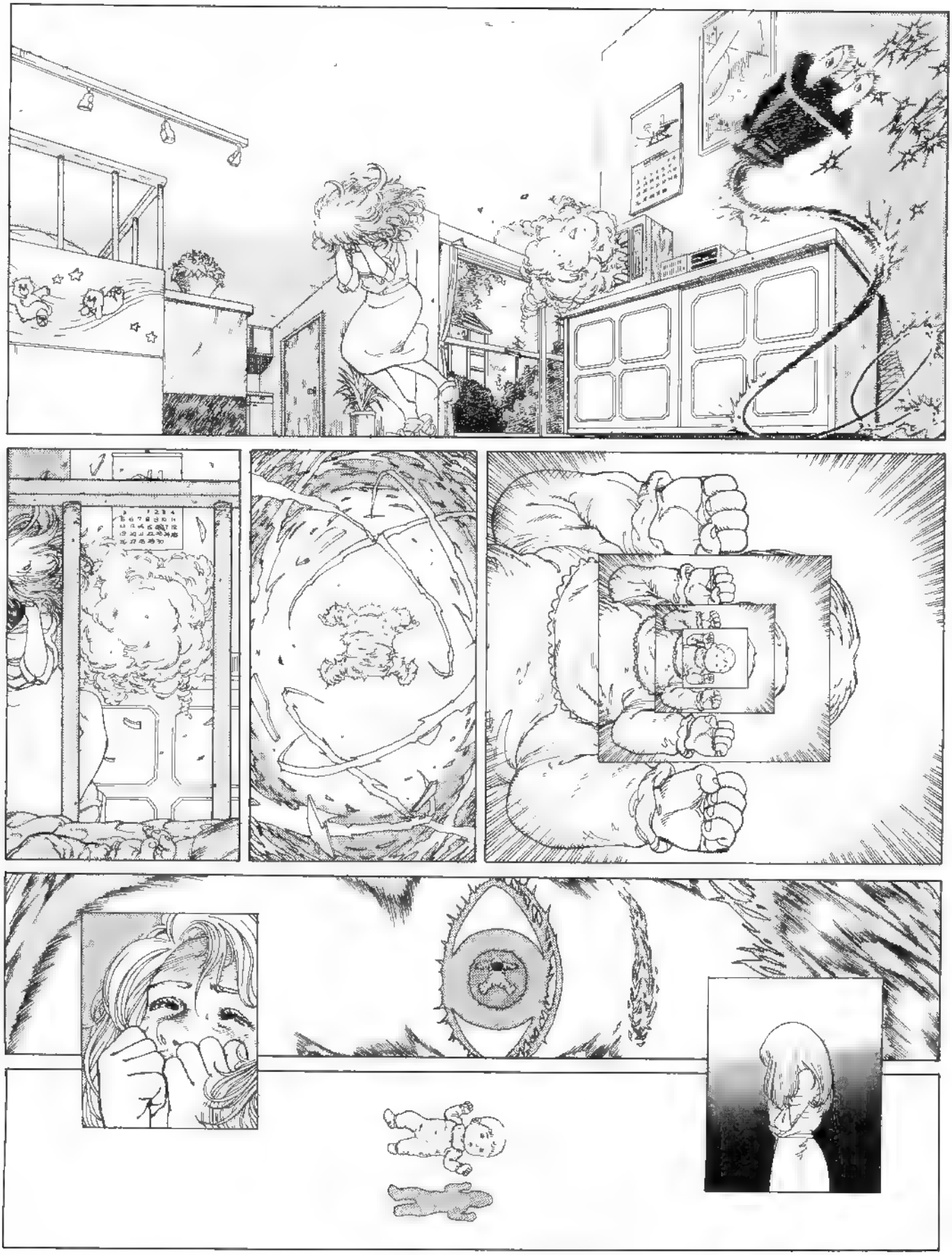
...BACK TO YOU...

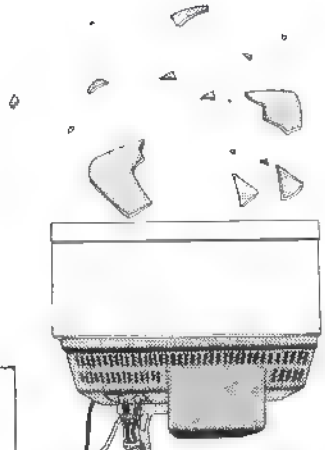




FEDERAL





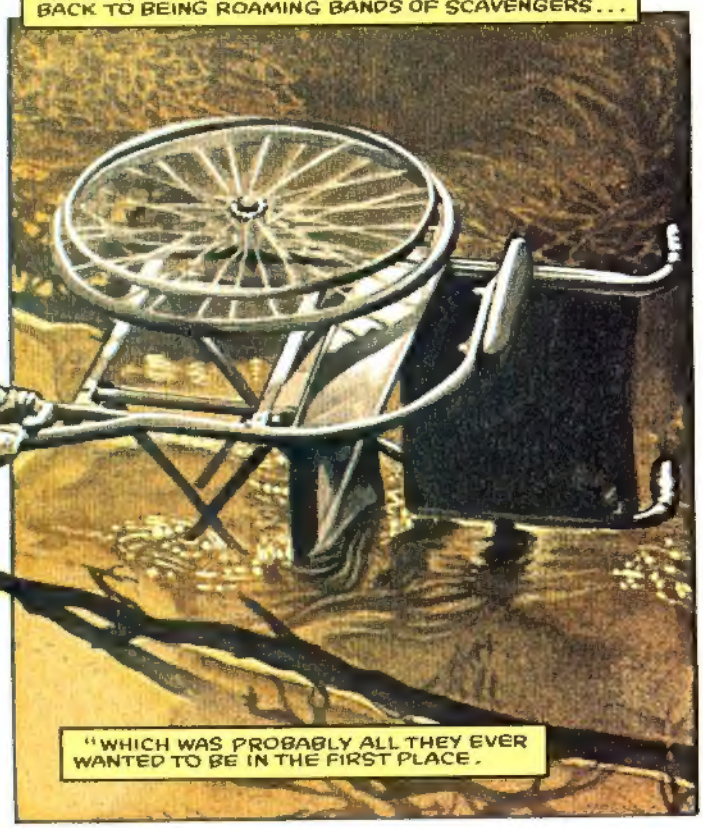


"AND SO, A FEW NIGHTS LATER... HIGH ATOP THE FROZEN RAMPARTS OF THE CHATANOOGA DAM...
I DON'T LIKE IT, JANGO... YOU WOULDN'T THOUGHT THEY'D LEAVE THIS PLACE UNGUARDED.
NOBODY EVER SAID APES WAS SMART.
SMART OR NOT... WE'RE SITTIN' DUCKS, UP HERE. I'LL WIRE THE DETONATOR... YOU HURRY DOWN THERE AND SET TH' DYNAMITE.
I'LL GO AS FAST AS I CAN DO ME A FAVOR AND STAY AWAY FROM THAT THING UNTIL I GET BACK UP HERE.
I DON'T WANT TO SEE THIS BABY BLOW FROM ALL *THAT* CLOSE!
JUST DO YOUR PART. I SEEN A NICE, SAFE PLACE BACK THERE ON TH' CLIFFSIDE, BUT YOU'LL NEED T'RUN WIRE TO IT, SO HURRY UP.
"THE COLD WIND OFF THE LAKE COVERED THE SOUND OF APPROACHING FOOTSTEPS AND THE HUSHED GRUNTS APES USE AS SIGNALS. .ONLY THE TELL-TALE SOUND OF METAL AGAINST METAL ..
CLANK

"... ALERTED SCAR "
APES! . DAMN! MOVE IT, JANGO . THERE'S A HELLUVA BUNCH OF 'EM!
GET DOWN THAT ROPE! I'LL TRY TO BUY YOU TIME...
BLAM
BLAM
THEY'RE COMING IN FROM BOTH DIRECTIONS... CUTTING US OFF! WHATEVER TIME I BUY . IT WON'T BE MUCH!
JANGO!!
BDOW
BWIINN
IT'S OKAY, SCAR! I'VE DONE IT! THE CHARGE IS PLANTED!
KA-CHOW

BDOW BDOW BDOW
THERE'S ONLY GONNA BE ONE SHOT AT BLOWING THE DAM NOW...
NOTHING'S GOING TO KEEP ME FROM FINISHING THE JOB!
THONK
"NOTHING EXCEPT OMAR!
"OMAR RAISED THE AX THE SECOND TIME INTENT ON BRINGING OLD JOE HIS TROPHY...
BLAM
"BUT...IT WAS ONE OF THOSE NIGHTS WHERE *NOTHING* SEEMS TO GO AS PLANNED."
YOU DIDN'T EXPECT TO SEE ME HERE, DID YOU, ZACK?
ACK... BUT THOUGHT...
I *KNOW* WHAT YOU THOUGHT, SCAR. MAYBE I TRUSTED THE APES TOO MUCH... BUT YOU NEVER TRUSTED ME ENOUGH!
BLAM
BOOM
AND IF BLOWING THE DAM'S THE ONLY WAY WE CAN END THIS...AND FINALLY BRING ABOUT PEACE...
T-THEN... THERE'S STILL ONE ROVER LEFT... WHO CAN FINISH IT FOR YOU...

"AFTER THAT THERE WASN'T MUCH OF ANYTHING LEFT OF THE FACTORY. SOME SAY OLD JOE ESCAPED, BUT THERE WAS NEVER MUCH PROOF OF THAT. ONE WAY OR THE OTHER... THE SURVIVING APES WENT BACK TO BEING ROAMING BANDS OF SCAVENGERS...



"WHICH WAS PROBABLY ALL THEY EVER WANTED TO BE IN THE FIRST PLACE.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
A SHINING HOPE
"MANDY WAS DUE TO GIVE BIRTH TO ZACK'S CHILD, AND A GROUP OF US GATHERED TO CELEBRATE...
"IT HAPPENED TO CORRESPOND WITH ONE OF MAN'S BETTER HOLIDAYS...SO I USED THE OCASSION TO REESTABLISH ANOTHER OLD TRADITION."

WHAT'S THIS?
CALLED A CHRISTMAS TREE. YOU SEE, MANKIND HAD VARIOUS RELIGIOUS...
I MEAN TH'DRINK... WHAT'S IN THIS?
LIQUOR...IT'S CALLED LIQUOR. I CAME UPON BOXES OF IT UNDER THE COUNCIL HOUSE... ANYHOW, YOU SEE CHRISTMAS WAS A TIME...
BURNS...BUT YA KNOW, I BET IT'D GO REAL GOOD WITH CIGARS.
I'LL BE DAMNED! IT LOOKS LIKE...
IT'S PURE HUMAN...SOMEHOW, GENES UNTANGLED. ENOUGH FOR IT TO BE ALL HUMAN. IT'S AMAZING!
CONGRATULATIONS, HONORARY POPPAS! IT'S A BOY...
CAT OR DOG, CHARLIE?...WE GOT US A COUPLE OF SIDE BETS HERE...
WELL, I WISH I HAD BEEN THE ODDS-MAKER ON THIS ONE.
I NEVER THOUGHT I'D SEE ONE!
I'M GONNA RAISE HIM JUST LIKE A BOY-DOG! WHAT SAY WE HAVE US ANOTHER LIQUOR!
TALK ABOUT A MIRACLE...I AGREE WITH SCAR!...
A TOAST THEN...
IT'S A MIRACLE... PARTICULARLY IF YOU REALIZE THAT MANKIND, AT LEAST SOME OF THEM BELIEVED CHRISTMAS WAS...

TO THE MAN-CHILD.
TO MANDY, TO ZACK... AND TO GUTTERMAN'S FIRST GOOD TRADITION!
TO CHRISTMAS... PEACE ON EARTH, GOODWILL TOWARD... AH... TOWARD EVERYONE.
"THERE ARE ANIMALS THAT SWEAR THAT ON THAT PARTICULAR NIGHT... THERE WAS A SINGLE STAR THAT SHONE BRIGHTER THAN ALL THE REST. I SAW IT MYSELF. AND IT WAS FOR THAT REASON, MORE THAN ANY OTHER... THAT WHEN IT CAME TIME TO NAME THE MAN-CHILD, WE CALLED HIM 'TEXAS'."
D. H. Gutterman
HISTORIAN